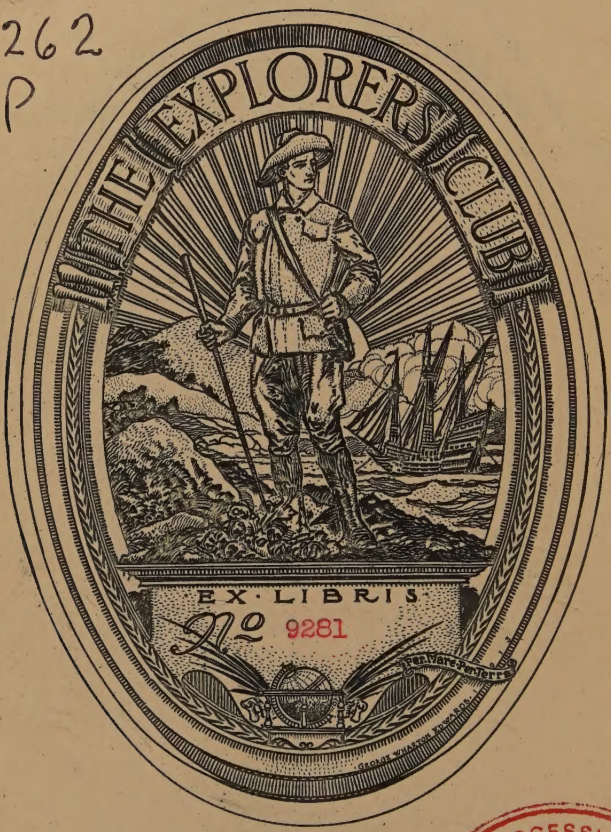
952
E262
P

9,281



PRESENTED BY
The Publisher

DEACCESSIONED
THE EXPLORERS CLUB
DEACCESSIONED

Persian Days, by Copley Amory, Jr. Houghton, 1929. $4.50.
A Persian Caravan, by A. Cecil Edwards. Harper, 1928. $2.50.
Twelve Days, by V. Sackville-West. Doubleday, 1929. $4.

Here are three new books which together fairly encompass the idea, if not the geography, of Persia—a land that seems somehow more remote and "Eastern" to our eyes than do India or the Spice Islands. These books both enhance and diminish this impression. The first named, whose author is (or then was) an attaché of the American legation in Teheran, is in effect, a nicely made narrative-guidebook to the customary round-trip of the sightseeing visitor, good roads (for Persia) and comfortable stopping places enabling him to journey from the capital to Isfahan and Shiraz and thence return to Teheran at relatively small time and expense. In fact, this is the only way open to the casual traveler in that country.

A perfect antithesis to this is Mr. Edwards's book, to which he has given the mystical title *Caravan*, for it is a camel-load, as it were, of packages of experience, now sober, now laughable, but always whimsically delicate, each wrapped in delightful English. Probably the phrase "character sketches" would classify them in a literary way, but whether real or imaginary, or a blend of both, the sketches reveal the spirit of Persia and the nature of the Persian mind of today in a very clever way.

Twelve Days recounts the exceedingly rough trip of a group of British and American adventurers, including the author (in social life, Mrs. Harold Nicholson) and her husband, who undertook to cross, afoot or on mules, the snowy mountains that separate the Persian plateau from the valleys of Elam. The trails they followed were those now familiar to us as the migration paths of the Bakhtiari tribes, which every spring move their camps and flocks from the parched western plain to better pasturage among, or east of, the mountains. These migrating nomads were met daily in weird processions by our travelers, and the picturesque scenes and adventures of the excursion are vividly related.—Ernest Ingersoll.

Explorers Journal July-Sept. 1929

A PERSIAN CARAVAN

A PERSIAN CARAVAN

Alfred Wall
A. Cecil Edwards

EXPLORERS
JAMES B. FORD
LIBRARY
CLUB

She asked, "What is your profession?"
"I am," said he, "a painter, who delineates the moon from behind a curtain."
The Adventures of Hatim Tai.

Publishers
HARPER & BROTHERS
New York and London
MCMXXVIII
-1928-

To Mr. Ellery Sedgwick, Editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, my thanks are due for permission to reprint eight of these tales and sketches; and to the Editors of the *Graphic*, *Country Life*, the *Twenty Stories Magazine*, and *Blue Peter* for permission to reprint them.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE CLOCK	9
THE GOVERNOR	14
OMAR'S GRAVE	24
THE DEBT	28
BURIAL	41
WATER	43
THE RUSSIAN	48
THE TOMB	63
THE RAVINE	79
DAVIDSON	94
SANCTUARY	104
POT-LUCK	112
THE CONVERT	128
THE KING'S BIRTHDAY	139

PICTURES

	FACING PAGE
THE PRINCE AND THE PHILOSOPHER	*Frontispiece*
AGHA YOUSSEF HAMADANI	14
THE POMEGRANATE	24
AGHA MIRZA IBRAHIM KHAN	43
PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN	63
RUSTEM SLAYING THE DRAGON	79
THE CUP	104
FERHAD AND SHIRINE	139

The pictures in this book are taken from a collection of Persian miniatures, old and new, in the possession of the author. They have been included, though they do not directly illustrate the text, because they represent, with more finish and fidelity than ever the author can hope to attain, some of the people whom he has endeavoured to portray.

TO

H. G. DWIGHT

92 81

THE CLOCK

(*The Doctor's Story*)

It is the travelling kind. I take it with me on my journeys, snugly packed in its red leather case. At other times, bereft of that armour against the uncertainties of Persian travel, it stands on the mantelpiece in my study—a sturdy clock of gilded metal.

I like the cool, liquid note with which it strikes the hours—not so loud as to disturb me at my work, yet loud enough to remind me, gently, of the inevitable lapse of time.

On the day that Agha Seyyid Fazyl sent his servant to inquire whether it would be convenient if he were to arrive at my service at an hour before noon, I answered, "Let him command," and prepared to receive my visitor.

Then it was that Habib reminded me that certain wives and mothers of the Khanum's acquaintance had asked her also to appoint a time, and that she had appointed the same hour of eleven. The drawing-room, therefore, would scintillate with unveiled ladies. Would My Honour receive Agha Seyyid Fazyl in the study?

My Honour would. Quickly, out of that wilderness of books and papers, order was evolved. Also a table was prepared on which five plates were set,

containing five kinds of sweetmeats; and charcoal was put into the samovar, so that the tea of custom might be ready.

At the appointed hour, the servant of Agha Seyyid Fazyl knocked at the outer gate and announced with hand upraised and in a hushed voice: "They are coming."

A few minutes later, through the drawn curtain of my study, I viewed the entry of that great man. He bestrode, as became the dignity of an ecclesiastic, a white ass, which appeared to carry his bulk with pride along the garden path. He was enveloped in an ample brown *abba*. He sat the animal huddled up, with back bent and head sunk on his breast, so that he looked for all the world like a huge brown sack set perilously on the small white donkey.

The demeanour of the Persians in the matter of calls is far above ours. Silence, with them, on such occasions, is not an indication of distress; it is a sign rather of cheerfulness and well-being. For they esteem conversation which is not edifying, unnecessary; and silence a thing too precious to be frittered away in small-talk. (Or is it that, having really nothing to say, they consider it the part of wisdom to say nothing?)

However this may be, we sat there, when the ordained inquiries as to our healths were over, in cordial silence. Habib brought tea, which we consumed with noises, but almost without words. From time to time my guest would hazard a short question, but of the kind which affords no opening for anything beyond a simple answer: as, "How much did you pay for that clock on the mantel behind you?"

Suddenly, the even tenor of our entertainment was cruelly convulsed. Sparks rushed into the room, barking. There hung from his collar a broken end of string.

To Persians all dogs are unclean; but for little dogs that bark and snap they have a peculiar detestation. And it would seem that little dogs are aware of it, for they look upon all Persians as their enemies and rightful victims. It is for this that Habib has strict instructions to keep Sparks tied up when I have Persian callers. But the string had not been equal to the strain. . . .

Agha Seyyid Fazyl, terror-struck, gathered his *abba* around him, and drew his fat legs as far towards his chin as his ponderosity allowed. I lunged forward and caught Sparks just in time to prevent the defilement of that holy man. I then dragged the dog by the collar from the room.

After giving Sparks his deserts, I returned to the study. My guest was sitting very straight in his chair, with his mantle arranged primly around him. I apologised for the intrusion of my dog. Agha Seyyid Fazyl nodded his head sagely several times, and murmured something in his beard.

After that I attempted bravely a conversation; but without success. Agha Seyyid Fazyl answered in monosyllables, or by a wagging of his vast turbaned head. I began to wonder how long it would be before Habib brought coffee, the signal for departure. In despair, I glanced furtively over my shoulder towards the clock on the mantelpiece.

The clock was not there.

In Persia, one learns to control one's emotions. I

could have sworn the clock was there when I went out; but even if it had been, what then? I looked askance at Agha Seyyid Fazyl, fearing that he might have detected my momentary excitement. But my guest was sitting with eyes half closed and head sunk forward on his breast, solemn and immovable.

Suddenly, from beneath the ample folds of Agha Seyyid Fazyl's mantle, I heard a little grinding sound, as of revolving wheels, followed by a muffled stroke. Then another, and another, and another——

The clock struck twelve!

How can I describe the agony of those twelve muffled strokes? If it had struck three times, or four—but twelve, Shade of Imam Reza!

There was a momentary quiver of Agha Seyyid Fazyl's enormous bulk. His impassive face became ashen, but he did not move a muscle. He continued to sit, immobile, with head bent forward and eyes half closed, as if he were pondering eternal problems.

The situation was saved by Habib. He brought coffee. We took out little cups with friendly ease. After he had drained his cup, Agha Seyyid Fazyl waited for the required time, and then begged me to command his departure.

A week later Agha Seyyid Fazyl sent his servant to inform me that his daughter was unwell, and would My Honour come to see her and ordain a medicine. It is my custom with Persians to collect my fees in advance, but I reasoned that in the case of Agha Seyyid Fazyl, whose honesty is renowned, I could safely make an exception.

I went. The girl was suffering from a minor

indisposition, caused, no doubt, by over-indulgence in cucumbers.

I prescribed something and left.

A few days later the servant again appeared, bearing on a tray something concealed beneath an embroidered cloth. He explained that it was a small present from his master, in recognition of My Honour's skill and kindness in restoring his beloved daughter to health. A Persian of position will rarely pay a doctor's fee in cash—he will send a present of becoming value.

I removed the cloth.

It was my clock.

FEAR was in his eyes. He moistened his lips and whispered: "They have arrested my brother."

There was something familiar in the face; yet I failed to place him.

"Who are you?" I inquired.

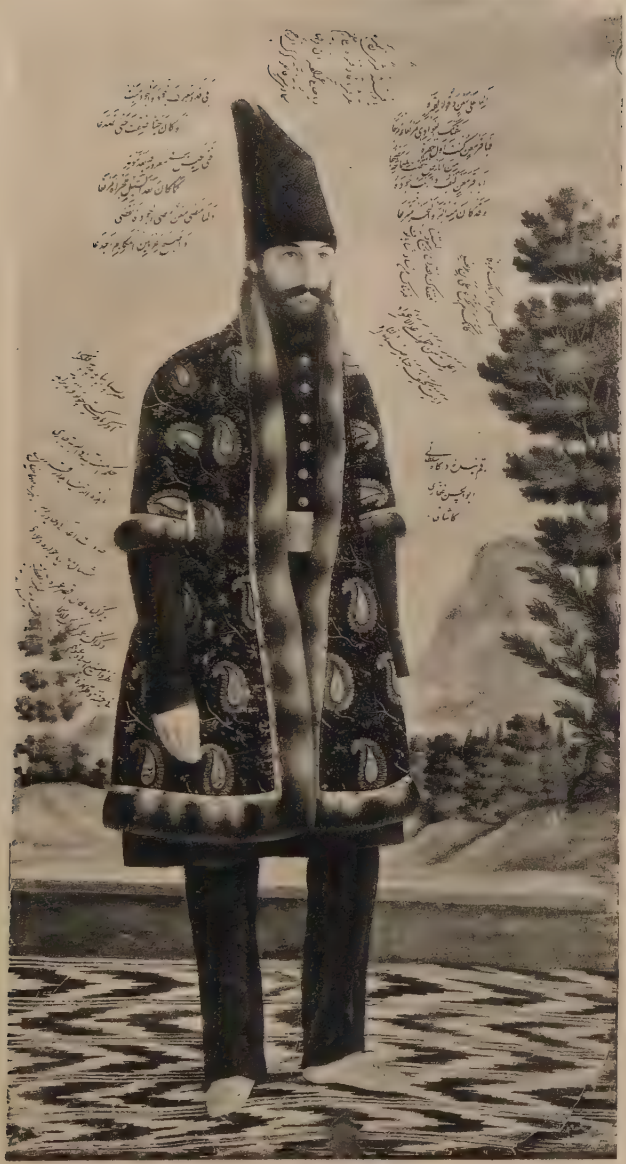
"Don't you know me, Sah'b? I am the brother of your clerk, Mirza Moussa. The police have taken him."

"The police!" I exclaimed.

"He was playing the *tar* in a garden. Mussulmans were there. It is Ramazan. The priests. . . ."

His voice died, from the abjectness of his terror. It was the terror of the Jew, sensing, from afar off, the pogrom; of the Armenian, haunted by a dark foreboding of massacre. My clerk, I remembered, was a Bahai. He belonged to that small community of Persian Jews who have abandoned their faith, storied and picturesque, for the newest of the world-religions.

Life in that small Bahai community, outwardly at least, was peaceful and secure; but from time to time something would happen which made one wonder if that appearance of well-being were anything more than an appearance. There were persons, it was said, who watched for "incidents"—furtively, intently; and who, when they occurred, seized upon them to lash into action the latent hatred of



the scum of the bazaar for the Bahais, knowing that when that hatred is aroused, nothing will satisfy it but blood.

Thus one would chance too often, in the affairs of the Bahais, upon that spectre, Fear.

On the edge of the town, along the foothills of the Elvend and reaching deep into those fertile valleys which pierce its mass, a thousand orchards blossom. There the people, in the summer months, carry their rugs and samovars to picnic in the open air. Into one of these orchards my clerk had wandered with a few friends, Bahais like himself. They had taken with them a *tar*, a Persian mandolin. They had carried a *tar* with them and a samovar, mindless that it was the Blessed Month, when Mussulmans fast all day; forgetting that fanaticism waxes on empty stomachs. The sight of those young men, followers of the execrated Bab, making merry in the month of fasting, had infuriated some fanatic Mussulman. There had been an altercation. Perhaps the Mussulman had struck the Bahai. If he had, I am quite sure that the young man would not have dared to strike back. In the end the police had interfered. The Bahai had been arrested—for disturbing the peace during Ramazan.

I thought: "The priests will be taking a hand in this; I must see the Governor."

Emir-ul-Mulk was Governor at the time. Though he had hardly passed his fortieth year, he was of an age that is dead. I hesitate to call him a reactionary—he was far beyond that. In spite of the Constitution, of Parliament, of the Press, he believed that the directest road to truth was by torture, and

that the best adornment for a town square was not a band-stand but a gallows. He held that the surest way to put an end to burglary was to catch a thief and cut off his fingers. His specific for brigandage, the *bête noire* of Persian governors, was the Getch, the Plaster: a brigand is lowered to his neck in a pit, which is then filled with liquid plaster—this, as it sets, expands. It is for an encouragement to the others.

His method for bringing down the price of bread was to nail the Chief of the Bakers by the ears to his shop-door; or, if that failed, to bake him in his own oven. When that redoubtable bandit Abbas, tired of pursuit, offered to give himself up in exchange for a free pardon, Emir-ul-Mulk swore on the Koran that if he surrendered, not a hair of his head would be touched. Yet, when Abbas came in, the Governor had him kicking the air before that rascal had time to drink, in memory of the Martyrs, a cup of cold water.

Yet in his demeanour Emir-ul-Mulk was of a mildness! A dapper, well-groomed little man, with a soft, humorous voice. When I think of him I forget his cruelties; but his gaiety, his humour, his love of a good story, his eye for a situation—these I shall not easily forget. And I remember that the people still say: "When Emir-ul-Mulk was governor, there was cheapness, and the Vilayet was safe." Whence it may be concluded that it is unwise to apply to one country the standards of another.

The Feranghi—be he missionary, traveller, manager of a local bank or trading company—will approach the governor of a province half as large as

England on a basis of perfect equality. It is the prerogative of the successful West over the East, the unfortunate, the defeated.

A liveried, barefooted attendant disappeared behind a curtain to announce to His Excellency my advent. I was ushered into a long, bare room. Its white plastered walls were pierced with little recesses, in rows one above another. Hundreds of tiny mirrors had been inserted in the spaces between these recesses, making the walls shine like burnished silver. On the floor lay a huge carpet, of noble and antique design. That, and those niched and mirrored walls, gave to the room a spare but dignified adornment.

His Excellency was seated at the far end. The floor about him was strewn with papers—whence I concluded that he had been busy with his secretary. It is the prerogative of those in high places to sign documents and throw them on the floor for the secretary to collect.

He rose and with a smile invited me to sit on the only other chair in that vast chamber. Then an attendant set before me a small table, and another brought a tray on which were a tiny glass of tea and a plate of round macaroons. Because it was the month of fasting, the Governor must not be served—at least in public.

His Excellency knew, of course, the object of my sudden visit; and I, of course, knew that he knew. Yet we avoided, with perfect understanding, a too precipitate discussion of the subject. Only when the second glass of tea had been consumed did I venture to touch, indirectly, upon the matter.

He had heard something about a young Bahai. Was he my clerk? The priests, as usual, were making a fuss. It was all too ridiculous.

Here was an opening; I remembered that ancient and bitter feud between Church and State in Persia. I said:

"Your Excellency knows, of course, that the priests are at the bottom of this and that they are trying to incite the people against the Bahais. Your Excellency has not forgotten the disorders which took place in Melayir last year, when two Bahais were murdered. Are the priests mad enough to think that they can revive the days of Sheikh Bagher, who cared so little for the Governor's authority that he cut off a man's head in the public square with the stroke of a sword?"

The Governor laughed, his delicate, deprecating laugh. "The priests are a little fond of taking a hand in affairs which are not their special concern," he said. "Perhaps some day they may find out how tender is my regard for them. Yet, to say truth, those Bahais do give us a lot of trouble. He was a good Mussulman, the Bab, yet he founded a new religion. Why did he do that? As if there were not enough religions already—excellent ones, too! And as if we governors have not enough complications! But you wish to save your Bahai Mirza, eh? Well, well, we must see what can be done. Suppose we begin by postponing the trial until after Ramazan. That will give their blood a little time to cool. Also, things will look different to them when their stomachs are full. Let me see. If we postpone the trial, must the young man be kept in custody? Perhaps,

if you will undertake to produce him in three weeks' time, I might let him out. Will that do? Are you satisfied?"

I thanked him profusely and sincerely. "When the trial comes on——" I began.

The Governor waved his hand. "One thing at a time," he said. "You Europeans are always trying to look ahead too far. Who knows what may happen after three weeks? Do I know? Do you know? Suppose this Jew who turned Babi should now turn Mussulman? Or suppose the chief mollah should turn Babi? Eh, that would be a good one! Agha Fazyl a Babi!" And he threw back his head and laughed delightedly at the incongruousness of the idea.

I thanked him again and assured him that I would answer for my clerk's appearance at the trial. Then I requested him to command my departure.

That evening, after dark, my servant knocked at my study door and announced that my Mirza, the Bahai, was without. The Governor apparently had lost no time in ordering his release.

He almost ran towards me, and seized my hand in both of his. He would have knelt before me had I let him. And all this he did humbly, deprecatingly, without a word, in the Persian manner.

I said: "I am glad the Governor released you so quickly, Moussa. Did he tell you that he has put off the case until after Ramazan? Meantime you may resume your work. I have given the Governor my assurance that you will be present when the case comes on."

He stood before me, silent, with eyes downcast,

holding his left wrist in his right hand. Then, without lifting his eyes, he said : " Did the Governor ask Your Honour to give the undertaking that I should be present at the trial ? "

" He did," I answered, " and I gave the undertaking willingly. The trial will take place in three weeks, after Ramazan. By that time the hearts of mollahs will be softer and their blood cooler."

He shivered.

" Do not be afraid, Moussa," I said. " Everything will be arranged. The Governor will not permit any injustice. He cares nothing for the mollahs. Of course, you must give me your word that you will not leave town before the trial."

" I will do as Your Honour and His Excellency desire." Then he waited with hands clasped and eyes downcast for the order to retire.

Three days later my clerk broke his bail.

It was like this. I went off for the week-end, to shoot gazelle from a Ford car. On Monday I was back again at my desk. Requiring some particulars, I rang for Moussa.

The Spreader of Carpets—which is the pleasant Persian idiom for an office servant—appeared and informed me, in his bland, non-committal way, that Mirza Moussa had not appeared that morning.

" Did he send a message ? " I inquired.

He had not sent any message.

" Go to his house, Asker, and see if he is sick," I said, " and ask why he has not sent a message."

The Spreader of Carpets disappeared. He returned in an hour, bringing with him Moussa's brother, the one who had first given me news of

his arrest. I questioned him. He spoke haltingly, but without that terror which had previously possessed him. Indeed, it seemed to me that I detected a note, if not of triumph, of indifference in his voice. Moussa had disappeared. He did not know where he was. On Saturday, after office hours, Moussa had left the house and he had not returned. They had searched everywhere.

The fellow was plainly lying. It was inconceivable that Moussa, who, after all, was a Jew first and a Bahai afterwards, should so set at naught the traditions of his race as to leave his family without a hint of whither he was going. I reasoned, however, that under the same tradition Moussa's brother would never divulge the secret. Anyhow, it was plainly my duty, as surety for Moussa, to inform the Governor at once and take my medicine.

Emir-ul-Mulk was alone. I was ushered into the long, bare room at once. I lost no time in making known the object of my visit. He listened without a word, and when I had finished he snapped out: "You stood surety for the man!"

"I did," I answered. "I was stupid enough to rely on his sense of honour and his loyalty to me. I took no steps to keep him under surveillance. I was wrong, of course."

"What are you going to do about it!" he snapped out again.

"That rests with you, Excellency."

He looked at me sullenly for a moment under his black eyebrows. Then he threw back his head and burst into loud laughter. "Oh, you Feranghis!" he cried. "Truly you are without that ruse which

is the very attar of existence! You need an abacus to show you that the half of a thousand is five hundred! Listen! It was I, Emir-ul-Mulk, who told your stupid Bahai to run away. Did I do that because I loved the Bahais? Or because this was a short way out of such a stupidity? Or because the man is a clerk of the Kompani? No. I did it as a little lesson to the mollahs—just to show them that they must cease from meddling in my affairs. A first, small lesson. Oh, they understood it soon enough! *They* knew, of course, that it was all my doing. They are not Feranghis. To-day Agha Fazyl—you know him, the man with a turban like the mountain of Elvend—came to see me. There were two or three others with him whose turbans are a little lower—a very little lower. I laughed at them. I said: 'Is that the way you look after your prisoner? Is that the way you watch over the interests of our holy religion? Why did you let the man out of your sight? But even now,' I said, 'all is not lost. The Sah'b stood surety for him. Go to the English Consul and make a protest—perhaps the English Consul will find him for you!' That was a good one, eh? The English Consul! They would go to hell first!" He threw back his head again and laughed.

A liveried attendant entered the room, carrying a tray on which lay a sealed telegram. Emir-ul-Mulk, still smiling at my discomfiture, took up a paper-knife and slit open the envelope.

The man was changed. The handsome olive face had become purple and forbidding. The veins stood out like whipcord on his neck and forehead.

The humorous, laughter-loving mouth was twisted with passion. Anger, hatred, cruelty, burned in the eyes. He sprang to his feet, and began striding up and down the room, clenching and unclenching his hands. "Ah!" he cried. "They have beaten me this time, but by the Justice of God I will repay them!"

Then, catching sight of me, he swung round. "Your idiot of a Bahai has made a fool of me," he cried. "I told him to get away and cover up his tracks, but the mollahs were too clever for him. Do you know what they have done? They have caught him in the bazaar in Kermanshah and murdered him."

OMAR'S GRAVE

We drew up before a dilapidated mud hovel. The door, a low hole in the wall, served both for entrance and for light. A happy familiarity with the ways of Persia enabled us to recognise this cheerless cavern as a tea-house.

The proprietor, a gentleman whom Mr. Wells would call one of the dark-whites—tall, lean, regular-featured, with head swathed in a brown turban in the fashion of Khorasan—greets us with :

" Command me "—which is the Persian way of saying " Welcome," or " Be seated," or " After you, please," or " Dinner is served," or " Speak ; I listen."

I put a tousled head out of the carriage window. Through a wide-open gateway, next to our tea-house, is wafted the tangy smell of horse-dung, and the hum of a million flies. It is the courtyard of the Posthouse, where lodge the lean horses of the Administration-of-Loading-and- Transport - of - the-Government. With meagre tails swishing at the flies the horses stand in fours around a sort of hammock, and munch their barley.

I ask : " What have you ? "

The Proprietor of the Teahouse : " Everything. A hen, bread, tea, eggs—(hesitates)—*mast* (sour milk)."

I ordered tea, boiled eggs, and *mast*.

When these are brought, I say to the proprietor: "How many farsakhs to Nishapur?"

THE PROPRIETOR: "A petition is made; three; light ones."

I (mechanically, having asked the same question ten times already since the morning): "Is the road good?"

He stretches out his hand, palm upwards, to indicate the utter smoothness and flatness of the road; and with a slow, falling inflection, to indicate perfection, he utters the word: "Smoo-ooth."

I: "We have heard that at Nishapur a poet is buried——"

THE PROPRIETOR: "It is true: Khayyam. But his grave is not in Nishapur. Half a farsakh from the city gate, there is a garden—a good garden of roses, fruit-trees and grape-vines. In the middle of the garden there is a mausoleum, where are buried the ashes of the Honourable Mohammed Mahrouk, the brother of the Honourable Imam Reza, the Refuge of Strangers (on whom be peace). The Honourable Mohammed was burned in this place by Jenghiz the Mogul (a thousand curses be upon him).[1] In a small porch adjoining the mausoleum is the tomb of Khayyam. It is of white plaster, the tomb—plain, without tile-work or any writing. Who would believe that a great poet is buried there?

"It is related," continued the Proprietor, "that

[1] The proprietor of the teahouse was a little weak in his chronology. Mohammed Mahrouk, the brother of the Eighth Imam, whose tomb in Meshed is the holiest shrine of all Persia, died four hundred years before Jenghiz Khan was born.

in his youth Khayyam had a friend called Nizam-ul-Mulk. Like Khayyam, he was poor; but being also wise and ambitious, he became at last the Sultan's Vizier. Then he sought out Khayyam and begged him to make a request even up to half his riches. But Khayyam answered: 'In the plain of Nishapur, where I was born, there are one hundred and fifty pieces of villages. And there is one small village there, half a farsakh from the Meshed gate, which produces the best grapes in all Persia. Let me be overseer of this village.' And there he died and was buried.

"It is related," continued the Proprietor, "that Khayyam was fond of wine, and that when he had drunk he spoke in *rubais*. One day, as he was seated on a rug on his verandah, with forty jars of wine standing in a row before him, there came a wind which blew down the forty jars and broke them. Whereupon Khayyam, looking over his left shoulder, whence the wind came, recited this *rubai*:

"'The wind, which broke my forty *kuzehs*, filled
With last year's vintage, in His wrath He willed;
Who is the greater sinner, he who drank
The rare, musk-scented wine—*or He who spilled?*'"

That night we spread our ground-sheets and sleeping-bags in the garden by Omar's tomb. Shall I forget the stately dome of the mausoleum of Mohammed, looming up from among those ghostly trees? Or Orion, hanging low over Nishapur? Or Sirius, burning in the east? While hidden away, in the annex of the mausoleum, that plain white slab of common plaster glimmered to the dawn's left hand.

We were informed by an attendant that an Englishman had visited the tomb last year and had promised to give money for a decoration of tile-work and an inscription. But nothing has been done. Perhaps that nameless Englishman has thought better of it. I trust he has. I like to think of Omar chuckling under his slab of plaster at all that pomp of pointed arch and soaring turquoise dome—the mausoleum of the roasted saint.

THE DEBT

WHEN my fat, spectacled friend, Samsam-ul-Mulk, Minister of War, was arrested by the leader of a successful *coup d'état*, he took his misfortune serenely, as became a student of the classics and a poet. Serenely, also, because he knew that in Persia revolutions do not kill. With that assurance which springs from a perfect understanding of the precedents, he waited for the moment when the new Prime Minister would condescend to discuss terms with him.

Into the details of that subtle negotiation I will not venture now. Let it be mentioned only that to a haughty demand—accompanied by recriminations and threats—for a payment of one hundred thousand tomans, my poet meekly offered ten thousand; that this offer was scorned by the new Prime Minister, who left the room in high dudgeon; that my poet smiled and waited patiently for his return; and that at the third interview, with great good-humour on both sides, a sum of fifty thousand was agreed upon.

To raise even a part of this important sum, Samsam-ul-Mulk was compelled to order his grain stores to be opened. For the rest, his Zoroastrian banker, Erbab Rustem, accommodated him, at twenty-two per cent. When at length the full amount was discharged, my friend received his

liberty. He at once quitted the capital for his estates near Hamadan.

It was during the years of his enforced retirement, following these events, that I met Samsam-ul-Mulk. He was living in his *kaleh* at Noberan—a huge, square, mud-built fortress, set on high ground in a broad valley, thirty miles from Hamadan. There, on either hand, his villages lay—one green patch behind another—as far as the eye could reach.

A pleasant garden lay inside the battlements, a garden of brimming rectangular pools and straight paths flanked with poplars. At one end spread a low white-plastered house ; two tall white-plastered columns supported the ceiling of its high audience porch, which jutted out, like a stage, into the garden.

In this retreat, secluded and secure behind that immense battlemented wall, Samsam-ul-Mulk held his court ; dispensed justice among his *rayats ;* gathered in his rents ; arranged small, harmless corners in wheat ; read his favourite Hafiz ; turned, from time to time, a not too indifferent couplet ; and from afar watched Tehran.

The revolution had been dead four years. I say ' dead ' advisedly, because the exalted programme and alluring promises which had accompanied the *coup d'état* had faded, imperceptibly, into a policy older and more familiar. That policy, ancient as the Persian State itself, time-honoured, accepted of the people, is called, in Persian, ' eating money.'

The Prime Minister who had so successfully negotiated with my friend had been succeeded by another. He, too, after an allotted span of four months of office, had gone, carrying off what he

could. With satisfying regularity the chiefs of the great families followed each other in office ; yet the keenest eye must have failed to detect any change, either for better or for worse, in the governance of Persia.

The revolution had been dead four years when, on a lambent evening, I sat with Samsam on his verandah, watching the shadows of the poplars lengthen in the brimming pools, while he recounted to me, in his suave, musical Persian, the events of the opening of this story. Then he said :

" You cannot understand these things. How should you understand ? Affairs with you are different. With you, honest and intelligent service is recognised and in time rewarded. But with us ? With us, when a man receives an appointment his enemies begin immediately an intrigue. He knows that, though he be Governor to-day, to-morrow he may be an exile—a man without a servant. What then should he do ? My friend, we should be fools if we did not eat ! Look at me. I was for eight months a Minister. I was eating little—very little. You see, I like to read Hafiz—also I have enough. Then came the *coup d'état*. Sardar Mo'azzam stated in his proclamation that he would begin by cleansing the departments. He began by stealing fifty thousand tomans from me ! That is the way of our reformers. They eat like the others, only more."

And then he added, blowing a filament of blue smoke upward, " Ah, yes, I had almost forgotten that fifty thousand—shall I ever get it back ? Most assuredly ! You ask me how ? I do not know.

There are ways and ways. But you must admit that the Government owes it to me. When will the Government repay that debt, I wonder?"

At that moment, as it were out of the skies, came the beginning of the answer. A barefooted servant, wearing a long, generously pleated tunic and the balloon-shaped hat of usage, sidled up to us and with both hands proffered to my friend a telegram. Samsam, having asked my permission in that deprecating Persian way, broke the seal.

A Persian telegram, at best, exacts for its elucidation a certain inventiveness. It would seem that the mirzas of the telegraph take pride in further lengthening the long pothooks of the *shekasta* script; and they must regard dots as trifles wholly superfluous. To the eye of the unpractised, most of the letters look alike. Even Samsam, I could see, was puzzled. The telegram was long, and he appeared to study every word. He went over it a second time, and a third. Then he turned to me.

"I ask pardon," said he. "A telegram from Tehran. Purposely, it is not in code, yet there are some words in it which I could not understand at first. There is news. The pot is boiling over there. May I read it? Listen:

"'*To His Excellency Samsam-ul-Mulk, Hamadan.* —Information has reached the Government that the Pretender Salar-i-Nizam has induced some of the Kurdish tribes to join his standard and to march on Tehran. This miserable force will be met and destroyed before it reaches the capital; but in the meantime it is necessary that urgent steps be taken to hold up the Pretender on his line of march at

Hamadan. Your Excellency's loyalty and skill in war ' "—(Samsam beamed at me over his spectacles) —" ' above all, the great honour in which your name is held throughout the province of Hamadan, impel me to call upon you for this service. You are appointed Governor of Hamadan, and are instructed to raise an army of ten thousand horsemen against Salar-i-Nizam. A telegram has been dispatched to the present Governor to hand over to you his office.

" ' MEHDI,
" ' President, Council of Ministers.' "

I said: " Salar-i-Nizam again? Will that man never tire of stirring up trouble? "

" He will never tire," said Samsam. " He is mad. He thinks that he is greater than Napoleon or Nadir Shah. Can you believe, he sleeps only four hours at night, because he has read, in some lying history, that Napoleon did so. He will try to seize the throne, and if he succeeds he says that he will march on India to drive the English out! I have heard him talk—it is like the waters of a river. Who knows?—perhaps he will arrive. These madmen—— " The phrase ended in an elusive shrug.

" What are you going to do about the telegram? "

" Oh, I am going into Hamadan at once to raise my army. But to do that "—he looked at me again, quizzically, over his spectacles—" to do that, money is required."

With an alacrity surprising in one habitually so deliberate he ordered his carriage, climbed into it, and invited me to a seat beside him. We started on our thirty-mile drive just as the jagged white line of the Elvend ahead of us took on a hint of rose.

It was midnight when we passed the turnpike at the edge of the sleeping town. We clattered through dark, tortuous, ill-paved streets, flanked on either hand by windowless mud-walls, until we reached, beyond the town, the more open country of the foothills. There we few Feranghis live. Samsam dropped me at my door. I heard him order his coachman to drive on to the telegraph office. I wondered whether he intended to rout out the wretched operator at that hour of night.

The next morning, when Habib my servant entered my room, I said, knowing that he has an interest in a tea-house, where the gossips of the quarter foregather: "Habib, is there any news this morning in the bazaar?"

"There is a news. They say that Salar-i-Nizam, with ten thousand Kurdish sowars, is coming to take Hamadan. They say also that the Governor has resigned and that Samsam-ul-Mulk has been appointed in his place. The Government has ordered Samsam-ul-Mulk to collect twenty thousand sowars to fight with Salar-i-Nizam. Samsam-ul-Mulk has telegraphed to the Government that without money he cannot raise an army. He has asked for seventy thousand tomans. All this is true. The mirza of the telegraph, who is my friend, told me."

In Persia, a telegram, if it is not in code, is common property. Even code messages—sometimes. . . .

Before noon I learned indirectly from the National Bank—indirectly, because Finlay, the manager, is a man who takes his position seriously and tries, with varying success, to keep secret the bank's operations—that Tehran had remitted fifty thousand

tomans to Samsam for the expenses of his army. Later, Habib came to my room to tell me, with emotion, that the new Governor had issued a proclamation calling upon every man between the ages of eighteen and forty to enrol at the Government House. "Up to now," he protested, "such a thing has not been heard of in Hamadan. Sah'b, what are your commands?"

I answered that, as I saw it, there was only one thing for him to do—to enrol; and also to bring me news of what was doing. In an hour he returned, smiling and much relieved.

"It is nothing," said he. "A way of getting money. I went to the Government House. There was a great commotion. The courtyard was filled with bazaar people and villagers. Two soldiers led me to a man who was sitting at the end of a long table. I knew him. He was an agent of Samsam-ul-Mulk. 'Ah, Habib,' said he, 'it is you. Well, have you seen the proclamation of the Governor? Are you ready to become a sowar and fight for the King of Kings against that miscreant, Salar-i-Nizam?'

"'Nasrullah Khan,' I answered, 'thou knowest I am ready. My life and that of my children are a sacrifice to the Point of Adoration of the Universe. Still, what have I to do with Salar-i-Nizam? And as to becoming a sowar, why, I should fall off my horse. Also, I am too old. Let me go back to my master, the Sah'b.'

"'True,' answered Nasrullah Khan; 'I had forgotten. You are one of the Sah'b's servants.'

"'The Head of his Servants,' said I.

" ' It is well,' answered Nasrullah Khan. ' You are excused. But everyone who is excused has to pay three tomans. You must pay three tomans.'

" ' Why three tomans ? ' I asked. ' Others are paying one toman.'

" ' It is true,' answered Nasrullah Khan, ' but they are villagers, and beggars, while you are the Head of the Servants of the Sah'b. Three tomans ! It is as cheap as the water of the river.'

" I gave him two tomans," said Habib, " and I received my paper. Here it is. Truly, Samsam-ul-Mulk has a cleverness. He is collecting thousands of tomans from the people, but no army. Why should he collect an army ? It is the business of the Government to fight against Salar-i-Nizam. What are the Cossacks and gendarmes doing in Tehran ? It is their business to fight, not his. And if he were to raise an army, what kind of army would it be ? A rabble without exercise, without Maxims. The Kurds of Salar-i-Nizam would eat it up ! And then he would march on Tehran and seize the throne, and what would become of Samsam-ul-Mulk ? No, an army is not his business. What should he be doing with an army ? "

What, indeed ? An army could accomplish nothing—except swallow up the fifty thousand tomans !

Apparently, though, Samsam was getting something together. Not everybody in the town, I found, preferred a peaceful life, minus a toman or two, to a life of glory. Yet it must be added that most of his recruits were unable to purchase, like Habib, a paper of exemption.

A week later I went for an evening's ride to the top of a little hill that overlooks the plain northward and eastward of the town. Habib accompanies me on these occasions, because Safar, my groom, has never mastered the mystery of rising in the saddle, as the Feranghis do, to a trotting horse. As I rode over the brow of the hill—where, if one were to dig, the chances are that one would come upon the bones of a palace of Darius—I perceived, dotted on the plain below, a matter of fifty white tents. Habib exclaimed :

" Look, Sah'b ! The army of Samsam-ul-Mulk ! They say in the bazaar that he has collected five thousand sowars. Pah ! It is a lie. Five hundred, perhaps. And most of them are his own *rayats*. He pays them nothing, and each man brings his own horse. Do you see where he has pitched his camp ? If Salar-i-Nizam comes, he will attack the town from the other side. Yet Samsam has made his camp on this side. Assuredly he has some design."

That night I was awakened from my first sleep by what sounded like the crackle of musketry. There was a lull, and afterward, for some time, the sound of desultory firing ; then the rumble of a drum, growing fainter and fainter. Then silence. I went to sleep again.

In the morning, when Habib entered the room with early tea, I perceived that he was bursting with news.

" Sah'b, Salar-i-Nizam has taken Hamadan."

" What ! " cried I, jumping out of bed.

" It is nothing, Sah'b. Drink your tea in peace. The Kurds rode in at midnight. They fired a few

shots, but there was no opposition. Salar-i-Nizam has occupied the Government House."

"Has there been any looting?"

"None at all, Sah'b. Early this morning Salar-i-Nizam issued a proclamation to the townspeople, telling them that he had come to protect them from the robber government in Tehran, and threatening to shoot anyone who was caught looting. His Kurds will not be happy at that. But he knows them. He knows that they are good fighters until their saddles are heavy with loot. Then they begin to look behind them toward their villages and to forget the enemy. Until the battle for Tehran is won, he will forbid them. But afterwards? Assuredly he will give them the Tehran bazaar for two days as a reward. Alas for the poor shopkeepers!"

"Where is Samsam-ul-Mulk?"

"Where should he be, Sah'b? The camp in the plain has disappeared. Did I not say that he had a design? Without a doubt he has retired with his five hundred sowars to his *kaleh* at Noberan. There he will wait to see which way the tree will fall. Truly, Samsam-ul-Mulk has a cleverness!"

Later, I took a walk into the town. Habib, in his blue livery with gold buttons and his balloon-hat, followed me at a respectful distance. We found the bazaar thronged with hundreds of tough, undisciplined mountaineers, urging their wiry horses with strange cries through the anxious crowds of townspeople. The Kurdish troopers wore black trousers, each trouser leg as wide at the bottom as a woman's skirt, and long black coats, with sashes of

gay colours and of enormous length wound around their waists. And every man wore the peculiar head-dress of the Kurd, a black balloon-hat like Habib's, but flatter at the top, with one or more checked handkerchiefs tied loosely around it.

Salar's army rested for two days in Hamadan. Then, as suddenly as it had come, it disappeared. One had a vision of those ten thousand wild horsemen riding to the capital across two hundred miles of dry, desolate, sun-baked plain, searching out and devouring on their way every little store of grain or fodder which the wretched peasants had laid up against the long, cruel winter. I took out the map and reckoned, day by day, how far they must have gone on their journey. I calculated when the battle, if there was to be a battle, must engage. From Tehran there could be no news, because Salar had cut the wires; but I knew that certain of my friends had arranged to be kept informed, by runners, of the progress of events.

Then, on a sudden, the news passed from mouth to mouth that Salar's army had been beaten by the Government forces. The Kurds, it seemed, had been mown down by machine-guns directed by a German artillery officer. Back over the road which they had taken they were in full retreat, with Persian Cossacks and Armenian cavalry at their heels. In three days, I thought, they would be in Hamadan again—a broken, undisciplined rabble, greedy for plunder. There was time for all, Feranghi and Persian alike, to barricade our houses, to look to our firearms, and to conceal whatever we had of value that could be carried away on a Kurdish saddle-bow.

We might have spared ourselves the trouble. On the third day, the advance guard of the retreat—horse and man hungry, weary, dejected—straggled into Hamadan. All the afternoon and far into the night the troopers streamed in, too dispirited, too homesick, too exhausted to think of loot. All they wanted was bread, and that the townspeople, breathing more freely, gave them. Knowing that their pursuers were not far behind, they made no halt, but mounting again their jaded horses, the disillusioned children of the mountains rode out of the city, westward, toward their homes in Kurdistan.

When the last straggler was gone, I too mounted my horse, and rode in the opposite direction to meet the first of the pursuit. I had not far to ride: very soon I saw, through a cloud of dust, the fur caps of the Armenian cavalry. At their head rode a small, swarthy Armenian whom I remembered. And by his side, sitting easily a familiar grey horse, rode a fat, spectacled Persian gentleman, clad in a black coat buttoned to the neck, with a black cap, shaped like a pill-box, set jauntily upon his head. It was my friend. He seemed to be taking a hand in the pursuit.

As we rode side by side towards the town, I prevailed upon him to rest a moment from his wars and to discuss with me a bottle of Shirazi on my verandah. When we had dismounted, and Habib had filled the glasses, I said:

"Everything, then, has turned out all right?"

"Yes," he replied complacently, fanning himself with his handkerchief. "As I anticipated, the *mitrailleuses Maximes* of that German officer of

artillery made it unnecessary that my invincible army should participate in the battle. Like many famous generals of history "—he beamed at me over his spectacles—" I arrived when the mists of doubt had been dispersed by the noonday of certainty. But I was in time to take part in the pursuit."

" And that little debt of fifty thousand has been repaid ? " I ventured.

" Yes," answered Samsam with a sigh. " It has been repaid—at last. But with what a trouble, my friend ! With what a headache ! There was a small account for interest too—interest for four years. However," he added deprecatingly, " I will let that pass. Between ourselves, Salar-i-Nizam has paid it. Three weeks ago, before he entered Hamadan, he sent me a little present—to assist me in making up my mind ! Good-bye, my dear friend ! "

He climbed into the saddle. Gracefully he waved a fine Persian hand to me, as his grey curveted down my avenue of poplars.

BURIAL

"You are a doctor?" inquired the person in the pear-shaped hat.

The interrogation lacked the embroidery of usage. It was simple, direct, of the soil.

The traveller from those fabulous countries which lie a hundred nights' lodging from the village answered:

"No, I am not a doctor."

"You have a Book," answered the person in the pear-shaped hat.

There was finality in the remark, as if the possession of a book by a person from those wizard regions was indisputable proof of science.

"What is the matter?" said the traveller.

The person in the pear-shaped hat lifted a thin brown arm, covered from the elbow up in a loose sleeve of blue cotton cloth. He pointed to a space of rising ground across the road from the village. The place was dry and bare except for a score of low, shapeless mounds marked by rough stones from the hillside, set on end. A group of blue-coated villagers stood among the stones and gazed dully at the traveller.

The person in the pear-shaped hat said:

"We are burying a man over there. Yesterday his wife fled from his house, and he became ashamed. He became ashamed, so that he ate opium. So

much opium that his heart stopped beating. Is he dead? Is he not dead? We are not sure. But we think that he is dead. And it is our custom that if a man die, he must be buried at once. So we are burying him. But we are not sure. You, who are a doctor—— "

The traveller said:

" No, I am not a doctor."

The person in the pear-shaped hat turned away. He rejoined his companions. Two from among them stooped and lifted from the ground by each end a long narrow object, wrapped in white cloth. The bundle was tied at both extremities with string, but from one end protruded two brown feet.

The men laid the bundle carefully in a hole which had been prepared. A third man took up a spade and began to shovel in the earth.

The traveller shuddered. He thought:

" Under that crush of earth, if he is still alive, he will never wake. He will escape in his sleep." He thought: " Even if I could snatch him back, who am I to decide that he must return? He has escaped the torture of being ashamed; escaped hunger, disease, extortion. Let him lie."

The creaking road-carriage crawled over the shoulder of the hill. The wretched village, the group of mute, blue-coated villagers, the bare, forbidding place of burial, were blotted out of sight.

عالیجاه آقا امیرزا ابراهیم خان
۱۲۷۵
میرزا محمود

WATER

The lady in evening dress, cut low and adorned with green sequins, addressed eagerly a tall spare gentleman who was staring out of the window in astonishment at the blurred lights, the dingy houses, the unclean rain.

"Oh, Mr. Marlowe, I have been reading some of your poems from the Persian, and I am simply in love with them! They give one the atmosphere of the country so completely. Do you know, I begin to envy you every minute of time that you spent in that delightful land of rose-gardens, nightingales and running brooks——"

"Er—not exactly," Marlowe said.

Then he added:

"The country, for instance, between Yezd and Kashan is so barren, so desolate that you can ride across it for days and hardly see a tree, a human habitation, a piece of cultivated ground. And as for running brooks——"

The words seemed to bring something into his mind. He hesitated, considered, and then went on:

"I had been riding on this road for thirteen days and was approaching Kashan, my destination. Towards noon of the last day, I came upon a small wayside posthouse, which for an hour had been a speck on the horizon. It was a brown, square, windowless building covered, as buildings often are

in treeless countries, by a dome. Its squareness and its dome gave to it, I remarked, a Byzantine, an ecclesiastical air. I was surprised to see a few servants, in blue livery, lounging before the arched entrance. I concluded that some traveller of consequence was tarrying there.

"The servants disappeared when they caught sight of me. And very soon a portly individual, clad in a gaberdine of neutral shade and wearing a green sash round his waist, emerged from the building. He took his stand on the porch, a little in advance of his retinue, and awaited my approach. When I rode up, he greeted me in the genteel phraseology of usage. But discerning my embarrassment, he made haste to inform me that he was Seyyid Abbas, a merchant of Kashan. I remembered then that I had letters to a person of this name from a friend in Yezd. News of my approach must have reached him, and in the polite Persian manner he had ridden out a dozen miles to greet me on the road.

"I had been riding thirteen days. I was covered with dust, half blinded by the sun, exasperated by the termless monotony, irritated that I should have chosen to travel such dolorous spaces. So that when he enquired how I had fared on my journey, I spoke disparagingly of his country—to one who had ridden out a dozen miles to greet me on the road.

"He replied with confidence, with good-humour:

"'Wait until evening.'

"My host had ordered his servants to prepare lunch in the posthouse. He ushered me in due

course into the principal chamber. I found the earth floor garnished with a noble carpet from Kashan, where the best carpets in the world are woven. On the carpet a printed cloth was spread; it was dotted with little bowls of stews and sweetmeats; and, like a sun, in the centre of that fragrant system, lay a huge metal platter, heaped with steaming rice.

"I confess that my ill-temper was in a measure appeased by this gratifying display. As for my host, the sight of those good things had put him in the best of humour. Gently he rallied me on my peevishness:

"'Why, O Sah'b, have your times become so bitter? Behold, your journey reaches its end. And because it is fitting that the end should be pleasant and memorable, I will show you this day a wonder which will repay the heat and burden of a thousand farsakhs.'

"I had never before visited Kashan. As for my host, he informed me that he had never left it! I was curious to discover what estimable thing might be there. I recounted in my mind what I had read or heard concerning Kashan; but I could not recall anything of renown; except perhaps the fact, on which all later travellers are agreed, that two-thirds of it is a ruin, the habitation of scorpions and pariah dogs.

"In the late afternoon, at my friend's bidding, we turned off from the main road. We found ourselves, suddenly, in a large walled enclosure, filled with dusty trees. The sight of trees, grey and dust-covered though they were, was a relief to me, after

intolerable leagues of sun-scorched desert. I spied, in the centre of the garden, a kind of kiosk, which had been decorated once with gaily coloured tiles. But there were brown gaps in the walls where the tiles had fallen, showing the cracked and crumbling masonry beneath.

" ' This is Feen,' said my friend Seyyid Abbas, the merchant.

" I had heard of the garden, Feen. It was made, tradition said, by the great Shah Abbas, for a place of rest on the main road to Isfahan, his capital. It was restored, three generations ago, by the Wasp-waisted One, the man of three hundred wives, Fath-Ali Shah. His familiar, black-bearded visage and wasp-like figure still adorned a crumbling inner wall of the kiosk.

" Seyyid Abbas beckoned to me, and I followed him to another part of the garden. Soon he stopped and pointed to a little stream of water, no bigger than a man's arm, which issued by a broken conduit from a bank of earth. It ran for a dozen yards and emptied into a brimming water-tank. Then Seyyid Abbas, the merchant, turned to me and said :

" ' Sah'b, in the whole of Feranghistan, which you have seen and which I have not seen, tell me, is there a stream of water equal to this stream of water ? '

" What could I answer ? My mind roamed the earth and considered its rivers. I thought of a thousand ships setting, in distant seas, their several courses for the yellow Thames ; I thought of the Nile, ancient and august ; of the holy Ganges ; of the prodigious Congo, steaming, pestilent, miasmic ;

of the Father of Waters, bearing on his banks a dozen cities; of the Amazon; of Niagara!

"He said:

"'I perceive that astonishment has dried up the fountains of speech. Yet this morning you were looking without favour upon my country.'

"I answered:

"'What petition shall be made? I spoke quickly and without understanding.'

"He raised a deprecating hand, and said with becoming modesty:

"'On this engaging theme an obscure poet of Kashan has composed appropriate verses; so nearly do they approach the classic models that they have been mistaken for a ghazel of Hafiz. Begins:

"'More agreeable than the distant, repeated call of the partridge
Is the murmur, O Iran, of thy delectable waters;
The barren desert heard it and was changed
Into a moonlit garden of dark cypresses,
Which has become the refuge of the rose
And the place of torture of the nightingale.'"

When he had reached this point in his narration the tall gentleman remembered suddenly that there had been a lady in evening dress, cut low and adorned with green sequins. But she was not to be found.

THE RUSSIAN

ALONG the side wall at the far end of the vast apartment sat half a dozen sober-garbed officials, primly, in a row.

A small, distinguished-looking old gentleman, with restless eyes and a nose hooked and bony as the beak of a hawk, occupied a chair on the opposite side of the room—a chair larger and more ornamented than the others. His black coat was of the finest broadcloth, ample in the frock, with an upright collar notched at the throat like a clergyman's. His legs, too short to reach the floor, rested on the spell of his chair. His small feet were shod in patent leather. He wore his black pill-box hat jauntily over one ear. His silver-white moustache betokened scorn of those accepted ministers of age, indigo and henna. He was called the Sword of the State, and he was Governor of Tabriz and of the province of Azerbaijan.

A young officer, in the red-and-blue uniform of the brigade of Persian Cossacks, dusty and travel-stained, stood at attention in the middle of the room. He was responding, in sullen monosyllables, to a string of questions, addressed to him by the Governor's deputy, a scarecrow of a man in a gaberdine of smooth grey cloth. In these proceedings the Governor took no part. He sat deep in his chair, tugging at his white

moustache, heedless, seemingly, of what was going on.

At last the young officer, exasperated by this stupid inquisition, and emboldened by the silence of the old gentleman, swaggered across the carpeted floor and addressed the Vice-Governor with that half-concealed contempt with which the military, even in defeat, regard the civil power.

"His Exalted Presence wished to be informed of the progress of operations. I have kept him informed. It is not my affair to answer for what has happened."

"Nevertheless, you should speak with more respect of the Government troops," said the Vice-Governor. He glanced nervously at the little old gentleman for an indication of support, but failed to discover any sign of it in his demeanour.

"What I have written, what I have said now," cried the young officer hotly, "is the truth! If I had not told the truth——"

"You would have been thrown into prison," interrupted the Sword of State coolly. "Go on."

The young soldier was for a moment confused by this unlooked-for interruption, but quickly regained his self-possession. He turned, addressing more properly the Governor, and continued:

"The army, sir, is shattered. The Kurds suddenly opened fire with half a dozen machine-guns. The Staff did not even know that they possessed any. They cursed first the British and then the Turks for supplying them. As for the troops, they were too frightened to fire. They hugged the ground in

their shallow trenches. When the Kurds charged, they ran like partridges."

"The Kurds are still far away, are they not?" hazarded, with feigned detachment, the Chief Secretary, a large, black-bearded gentleman in a white turban.

"Do not be alarmed, Sadr," interrupted grimly the Sword of the State. "Your villages are not in danger." At this remark, the members of the Council laughed, a little nervously. The gentleman in the white turban looked confused, and subsided.

"They are not so far away," replied the young soldier. "The battle, if one can call it that, took place on this side of Salmas. Our troops were scattered. Most of them are hiding in the villages and are lost to us. Some are falling back on Khoi with the guns. From Khoi to Tabriz is six days' march."

"The Kurds will never dare to attack Tabriz, the second city of the Empire!" cried the Vice-Governor. He glanced in alarm at the heavily embroidered curtain which hung, in lieu of a door, over the entrance, as if he feared that those savage warriors might break in upon them then and there.

"By Abu'l Fazl," cried the Sword of the State, "if I had a chance to loot Tabriz, I would take it!"

There was a movement behind the embroidered curtain which hung over the doorway. Then a thin, piping voice broke in upon the deliberations of the Council:

"A petition is made to the Most Exalted Presence! There is a man who sells caviare——"

Everyone turned. A bent old man, in the blue

tunic and faded gilt buttons of the Governor's livery, bare-footed and wearing on his head a balloon-shaped hat, stood before the curtain.

"Caviare!" exclaimed the Vice-Governor, that scarecrow of a man.

"Caviare?" questioned the large gentleman in the white turban.

"Hossein Khan," said the Vice-Governor severely, "how often must you be told not to allow others to interrupt nor yet to interrupt yourself the deliberations of the Council?"

"This man who sells caviare," continued the old servant in his piping voice, "yes—and cheeses from Erivan and fish in boxes——"

"Silence!" thundered the Sword of the State.

"He is a Russian General," said the shrill, piping voice of Hossein Khan.

The Sword of the State started and sat bolt upright in his chair. "Eh? What did you say? A Russian General?"

"A Russian General," piped the voice of Hossein Khan. "True, he keeps a shop in the bazaar, but he has had experience of fighting with Kurds."

"A Russian General," sniggered the Vice-Governor, "who sells caviare and cheeses!"

"And why not?" cried the little, keen-eyed old man who was called the Sword of the State, looking sharply from one to the other as if he dared anyone of them to answer him. "And why not? He is doubtless a General of the late *régime*, a man of authority in his own country, perhaps a lord of a hundred villages. He cannot return to Russia because they are murdering men of honour there and

stealing their estates. He remains with us. He is without money, yet he must live. He thinks that there may be a demand here for the caviare and cheeses of his country. Instead of standing at street-corners or living on the charity of others, he opens a small shop. He makes honourably his expenses.

"You have told us, Hossein Khan," continued the Sword of the State, "that this Russian General has had experience of Kurdish warfare. Perhaps he served under Linievitch in Kurdistan. I knew Linievitch. He was a gallant officer and an honourable man. The Bolsheviki took him as he was selling matches in the streets of Tiflis; they shot him because they knew that he was a better man than they." The old man stood up before them all. "The tale of the sufferings of these men will never be told. Many that I have known have sunk under the weight of their misfortunes. For these we are sorrowful. And for those who are struggling to maintain their dignity, we have respect. Hossein Khan, you have forgotten to give us the name of this General who is a guest in our city."

"A petition is made to the Exalted Presence," answered the old servant. "His name is Andréev."

"I have no doubt that General Andréev is an honourable person. Also, his advice at this moment will be valuable to us. Hossein Khan, go at once to the shop of His Excellency. Present to him the Governor's compliments, and request him to bring his honour to us here at the Government House, as early as it is convenient for him to do so." He waved an arm. "The Council is dismissed."

The old servant smiled delightedly. He touched his right eye, to denote that he pledged that organ against the execution of the command. Then he disappeared behind the curtain.

II

"He is here," said the piping voice of Hossein Khan. He lifted the curtain and the Sword of the State rose to receive his visitor.

A tall Russian of about thirty-five advanced easily to meet the Governor. His eyes were blue, frank and smiling. His fair, closely cropped head was set squarely on broad shoulders. He wore a shirt of black sateen, closed at the neck and buttoned over his left shoulder. It hung like a short skirt outside his trousers. A thin black leather belt hung loosely round his waist. His boots, which came up almost to his knees, showed signs of wear. When he smiled, which was often, his teeth showed white and regular under a fair, drooping moustache.

"You are welcome, General," said the Governor, extending his hand to the Russian. "Pray be seated. Shall we converse in Persian? Or perhaps you understand our Turki better?"

"For me Turki is easier," answered the Russian, in the dialect of Azerbaijan.

'Excellent," answered the Governor. "I am myself a Turk of Azerbaijan, and of course I prefer my own language. You know, we Azerbaijanis never learn to speak Persian properly: to say truth, we don't like to use it, except for writing. General, before we go further, I must express my regret to

you that we have been strangers to each other until now. We Governors are supposed to know everything, yet I am ashamed to say that I did not hear until to-day that you were a guest in our city."

The Russian smiled, whimsically. "A guest? You call it that?"

"It is not often that we can profit by the misfortunes of our friends," said the old gentleman, bowing gravely. "And now that I have apologised for my ignorance and remissness, I will give you another and a more selfish reason for requesting the honour of your presence to-day. Will you pardon me if I ask you first a few questions which may appear unseemly? I will explain the reason to you at once. General, I understand that you have had some experience of warfare with the Kurds. Is that so?"

"I commanded the cavalry under Linievitch," said the Russian simply.

"Linievitch? Indeed? I knew him well. He commanded a sotnia of Cossacks which was stationed in Hamadan, where I was Governor before the war. He was a Captain then. An excellent man."

"We loved him," said the Russian simply. "He is dead."

"I heard with horror of the end of that brave man," said the Governor. "May I express to you, his comrade-in-arms, the sympathy of all good Persians and their detestation of these crimes?"

The Russian bowed, but said nothing.

"And now," said the Sword of the State, "I will tell you what is on my mind. A young officer has

just returned from the front, where, as you know, the Kurds are giving trouble. Our operations there are not going well—in fact, things are going very badly. There has been a battle near Salmas. In the picturesque language of my young officer, our troops ran like partridges. Did you ever hear of such a thing? Persian troops—like partridges!" The Governor glanced keenly at the Russian, who made no remark. The old man went on. "The Kurds are advancing on Khoi, looting the villages and carrying off the cattle. There is apparently nothing to prevent them from taking Khoi, and perhaps advancing on Tabriz. That, in short, is the situation. General, you know the country and the Kurds. I should like you to say frankly what you would do, if you were in my place."

The Russian paused a moment, hesitated, then answered, with a smile:

"If I were in Your Excellency's place, I should not tell anyone what I intended to do."

"Good!" cried the Sword of the State. "But suppose your opinion were asked, merely as an expert?"

The Russian paused again and considered. Then he answered slowly:

"I would advise a change in the high command."

"Ah," said the Sword of the State quickly, "and whom would you appoint?"

The Russian again paused to consider. Then he answered gravely, without a trace of vanity or bravado:

"Myself."

The little old gentleman nodded understandingly,

but made no reply. His thoughts were in the capital. What would they say in Tehran? Peh! Let them say! He was too old to care. His business was to beat the Kurd. Yes, but was this the way to do it? How could he put aside a brother of the Minister of War and replace him by a Russian? No; if he did that, the soup would boil over. Affairs are not managed in that way. Nevertheless, something could be arranged.

He spoke seriously to the Russian. "General, it is impossible. Why? For many reasons, but one only is enough: this Habibullah Khan, our fat, amiable commander of the troops, is a brother of the Minister of War. You understand that if I were to do as you suggest, I should soon be on my way to Tehran, and you would again be selling your caviare; and, what is more, you would be selling it cheaply, lest the Kurds should get it for nothing! No. Affairs with us are not managed like that.

"There is, however, an easier road. I could send, for instance, to Habibullah Khan, an assistant, an adviser. Perhaps even a Chief of Staff! That, yes. Why, he would be pleased and flattered to have under him a General of the Czar's army! A General who has served under Linievitch in Kurdistan and who would relieve him of much of the headache of war; who would help him to re-establish a reputation which is at present somewhat under a cloud! You would have no trouble with Habibullah. I will see to that, if necessary. I have only to remind him that a certain despatch about the affair at Salmas has not yet been sent to Tehran, but that it might still

be sent! I am confident, however, that this will not be necessary. Habibullah is really an excellent fellow. I am very fond of him. For a soldier, he considers, it is true, a little too much his stomach—which, I warn you, is of a capacity! So much the better. If you feed him well, he will leave everything to you. What do you say?"

The Russian did not wait to consider. He answered:

"I will go."

"I knew that you would understand the delicacy of the situation. By the way, a few tins of your caviare would make Habibullah your friend for ever. He has a passion for caviare. Good-bye. In a month I shall hear that the Kurds are making for the frontier with our cavalry at their heels. Remember, feed him well, and if you need anything, I am here."

III

During the weeks that ensued the old gentleman who was called the Sword of the State followed, as closely as he could from such a distance, the fruition of his plans. The reports which he regularly received from divers confidential sources he diligently checked and compared. In the main, they tallied. There were accounts of continuous grinding drills, of gruelling route-marches, of daily rifle and artillery practice, of tests with transport, of small manœuvres with all arms. The army was certainly being hammered into shape.

Not a day passed without a telegram from the

Russian. He must have blankets or boots or coats or saddles or tents or ammunition. He was insatiable, that man; and he wanted everything immediately; as if anything in the world could be done immediately. Nevertheless, he must be satisfied.

Late one afternoon, a mud-bespattered car whizzed into the garden of the Government House. It was the Russian. He jumped out and climbed the stone steps three at a time. In half an hour he was gone. But not before he had obtained the Governor's sanction to another of his schemes. It was to raise a regiment from among the Christian refugees who had been driven out of their frontier villages by the Kurds. The very next day the first two hundred of them left for Khoi. In three days, a thousand more tough, hardened peasants marched, singing, out of Tabriz to join the army and avenge their wrongs.

And then—after two months of telegrams and counter-telegrams, of comings and goings, of scouring the bazaar to find the impossible, of endless caravans of supplies, of frenzied finance—there was silence! It was as if Khoi had been swallowed up. Not a whisper, not a telegram, not a report! The Kurds—were there any Kurds? The army—had it ever existed? Those were days of deep anxiety for the old man. His brow was black—no member of the Council dared approach him. He tried, almost every hour, to communicate with Khoi. But always there was the same reply from the operator: "Khoi does not answer."

And then—at last—a telegram! The Sword of the State tore it open. It was short enough:

" The enemy is routed ; 300 killed, 300 wounded and prisoners ; six chiefs taken ; all their guns captured ; our casualties 100 in all.

" HABIBULLAH."

The Governor drew a long breath, then laughed and rubbed his hands. " He has done it, that Russian, by Abu'l Fazl ! " He took up the telegram and read it a second time. " Habibullah ? Oh, yes, he is in command. I had forgotten it." He chuckled. " Though Habibullah signs the telegram, he never wrote it. It is the Russian's—laconic, like himself. Habibullah would have telegraphed ten pages." He gave orders for the town to be illuminated in honour of the victory.

During the next few days further news of the battle filtered in. It appeared that the brunt of the attack, as was fitting, had been borne by the Persian troops, who had covered themselves with glory. The Christian refugees had been placed in the second line, in support. Later, it was hinted that the Persians had been told that, if they ran, their supports would fire on them ! When the Sword of the State heard that, he flared up, but then lay back in his chair and roared with laughter. " By the Tomb of the Prophet," he cried, " I must remember that ! It needed this Russian to teach us how to make the Persians fight ! "

IV

Hossein Khan raised the heavy embroidered curtain, and stood before it with hands crossed over his middle, waiting to be addressed. " What is it ? " said the Sword of the State testily.

"There is a petition to the Exalted Presence," said Hossein Khan in his piping voice. "He has opened his shop again."

"Who has opened what shop?" said the Governor.

"The Russian."

"Eh?" cried the Sword of the State, turning swiftly in his chair.

"Until to-day it was closed," said Hossein Khan. "This morning it was open. The Russian——"

"Yes?" said the Sword of the State impatiently.

"He is there," said Hossein Khan.

"Ah," said the Sword of the State, "so he has arrived. He will come to see me presently."

The Russian did not appear that day. Nor the day after. The Sword of the State waited, becoming more and more impatient. On the afternoon of the third day he ordered his horse, and said to Hossein Khan, "Come."

Thus the good people of Tabriz were surprised by the unusual spectacle of their Governor, the Sword of the State, riding through the town, attended only by the Head of his Servants.

Hossein Khan pointed across the street to a narrow door, the upper part of which was glazed with square panes of thin, greenish glass, which played tricks when you looked through it. On one side of the door was a shop window, glazed with the same wavy glass, behind which were neatly displayed a round red cheese, a few tins of sardines, two large sausages and a small open cask of caviare.

"It is there," said Hossein Khan, and dismounted to hold his master's horse.

The Sword of the State advanced towards the shop and opened the glass door. Within, along one side, ran a wooden counter, unpainted, on which stood a pair of Russian scales of heavy metal and an abacus. Against the wall was a glazed fixture of unpainted wood. On its three narrow shelves was a miscellaneous stock of what the Russians call *conserves*—fish, butter, caviare, and the like—in tins. The Russian was standing before his fixture, with his back to the door. He was wearing the same black shirt, gathered in at the waist, which he had worn on the day of his first visit to the Governor.

The Sword of the State advanced towards the counter. He said: "Give me a pound of caviare."

The Russian turned. He lifted a round tin from the fixture behind him and laid it on the counter.

"Why have you not come to see me?" said the Sword of the State.

The Russian smiled, his good, serious smile.

"The business for which I was engaged was finished. There was my shop. I thought I would like to come back to it—without any fuss."

"What!" cried the old gentleman. "After you have defeated the Kurds for us, you leave us, like that, to sell caviare and cheeses!"

"Why not?" said the Russian. "You see, I undertook this Kurdish business, only because I knew that it would be finished quickly; you see, I was a little tired of waiting——"

"Waiting?" questioned the Sword of the State.

"Yes. Now I am free once more—to sell my caviare and cheeses! Free—and ready."

"Free?" questioned the Sword of the State. "Ready? For what?"

"For Russia," answered Andréev. "She will need me before long."

THE TOMB

FROM his seat on a mattress covered in red plush, which lay in the centre of a huge carpet of arresting pattern, a bearded old gentleman, whose goodly proportions were at the same time indicated and concealed by a brown mantle of ample yardage, remarked benignly :

" Touching his prolonged journeys, the Honourable Engineer has condescended to relate some curious and picturesque experiences ; wherein, doubtless, there may lurk, somewhere, a clove of truth."

The slim, olive-tinted young man in the black tunic and pill-box hat, who stood respectfully before that pyramid of flesh, broadcloth and upholstery, answered with some warmth :

" That which your servant has described, his eye has seen. The avenue is a hundred paces wide ; also it runs in a straight line through the city for six farsakhs—— "

" Who shall deny the traveller his tale ? " mused the stout old gentleman, who was called Preserver-of-the-Kingdom.

" To deny a tale to a traveller," said the engineer, " would be unworthy of the magnanimous and discerning Presence. Nevertheless your servant has refrained, in this instance, not without difficulty, from garnishing the skirts of truth with the embroidery of fancy. As I have explained, the people of the city

which has been described number as many as all the inhabitants of Azerbaijan, Khorasan, Fars, and Kerman together——"

"Peace!" said the stout old gentleman. "A city, to hold so many people, should be twenty farsakhs long, not six."

"Not so," answered the young man, "if the houses in it are six times the height of the minarets of the Mosque of Friday."

He who was called Preserver-of-the-Kingdom made no reply. He let his eyelids fall and allowed his ponderous head to sink on an ample bosom. After an adequate pause, his eyes reopened and he inquired with suspicion:

"This avenue, which you say is six farsakhs long, and runs through a city whose houses are six times as high as the minarets of the Mosque of Friday——"

"As I petitioned," said the young man.

"Who made it?"

The engineer, disdaining an admission of ignorance, took advantage of an opportunity for loosening the bridle of his fancy.

"The avenue was built by the wisest governor the city ever had. When it was finished, the gratitude of the people was such that they named it after him, so that his renown might endure for ever."

The stout old gentleman again bent his head and pondered. At last he was heard to murmur:

"The Avenue of the Preserver-of-the-Kingdom," and again: "The Avenue of the Preserver-of-the-Kingdom." Then he said cautiously: "Should it become apparent that the people of this city also

desired such an avenue, could the undertaking be accomplished ? "

" Most assuredly ! " cried the engineer with enthusiasm. " Why, just before they sent me here to dwell in the shadow of the Illustrious Presence, I had completed such a road outside Tehran. It runs from the Gate of Shimran to the Hill of the Hare—— "

" What would be required," interrupted the Preserver-of-the-Kingdom, " for such an undertaking ? "

" First," answered the engineer, " a plan of the town must be carefully prepared—— "

" It is unnecessary," interrupted the stout gentleman. " Everything is plain. The avenue will begin at the Gate of the Lion, which is at the lower end of the town, and will proceed in a straight line, without deviating a hand's-breadth to the right or left, until it reaches the Gate of Sheikh Mahmoud at the upper end. What next ? "

" Then," said the young man, " an order must be written, bearing the seal of the Illustrious Presence, which will enable your servant to remove certain houses which might be found unfortunately to lie in the line of the proposed road—— "

" Such an order is wholly unnecessary," interrupted the Preserver-of-the-Kingdom. " The houses may be removed. Proceed."

" Then," continued the engineer, " to the owners of the removed houses it is customary to give a promise of ultimate compensation."

" Compensation indeed ! " cried the stout gentleman indignantly. " When I am about to present

them with a noble avenue, planted on both sides with trees ! "

" Your servant spoke only of a promise," said the young man airily. " The matter of fulfilment was not touched upon. To those who have eaten the bitter herbs of despair at seeing their houses demolished before their eyes, such a promise would come as a spiced sweetmeat of hope."

" Or as the apparition of a lake of reeds and floating islands to the ignorant and distracted traveller in the desert," murmured the Preserver-of-the-Kingdom. " Setting aside the matter of compensation," he added cautiously, " there are, perhaps, other expenses ? "

" Difficulties of this nature can be easily resolved," said the engineer. " If, for instance, an insignificant tax of one kran were charged on every ass, mule, horse and camel which enters the town, ample funds would be provided for meeting any unavoidable expense."

" Certainly, on the score of the heavy cost of construction and ultimate compensation, a sum might be conveniently collected in the manner described," said the Preserver-of-the-Kingdom thoughtfully.

" Most assuredly," cried the young man ; " and further, this tax, once imposed, might be usefully retained for the upkeep of the road—or for general purposes. And as for workmen, the town prison is doubtless full of thieves, murderers and other lost persons, who in their red and yellow costumes, with chains round their ankles, attached to heavy iron balls, would provide a sufficiency of picturesque if reluctant labour."

"True, true," murmured the stout gentleman.

He closed his eyes again, allowing his head to sink once more on his bosom. After an appropriate pause, he reopened them and said:

"The suggestions of the Honourable Engineer have been weighed and are found acceptable. When could the work be commenced, and when would the avenue be ready for the ceremony of opening and naming?"

"Why," said the young man, "there is no day like the first day of the New Year for festivities of this nature. If your servant undertakes to have everything ready by then, which is to say in nine months' time——"

"It is accepted," said the Preserver-of-the-Kingdom.

II

He, who by all Saidabad is known as Chief-of-the-Masons and by the purveyors of lime, bricks, poplar poles and white plaster as The-Most-Famous-Architect, surveyed gloomily a scroll which the young engineer had unrolled before him on the table.

"It is but a rough, imperfect plan of the town," said the engineer. "You will say, 'It should have been drawn on a larger paper and every street, alley, mosque, caravanserai and house should appear.' True, O Chief-of-the-Masons, but what could I do? In the opinion of the Preserver-of-the-Kingdom such details are a headache and a complication. However, thanks be to God, I was able with my instrument to obtain a sight of the Gate of Sheikh

Mahmoud from the roof of the Gate of the Lion. So, we have our direction. We shall begin from the Gate of the Lion and work upwards, slowly, in a straight line, towards the Gate of Sheikh Mahmoud."

The Chief-of-the-Masons made no remark.

"Arrangements have been made," continued the engineer, "with the Chief of Police regarding the prisoners. Clad in their picturesque garments of red and yellow, they will work from sunrise to sunset, under a not too-exacting guard. It is true that most of them are sick and all of them are hungry, and the chains round their ankles will not increase the alacrity of their movements. Still, the surprising number of them may compensate for their want of zeal."

The Chief-of-the-Masons maintained a gloomy silence. The engineer, bending over his plan, continued with enthusiasm:

"The new road, as you perceive, will follow for some distance the Street of the Daughters. Then it will cross the Meidan and enter the bazaar, which we should reach in a month's time. There our headaches will begin. For the merchants, shopkeepers and money-lenders will refuse to be entertained by the new and startling experience of seeing their premises demolished before their eyes. Beyond the bazaar is the quarter of the Plane Tree——"

"Doubtless everything which has been conceived by the Honourable Engineer may be accomplished," interrupted solemnly the Chief-of-the-Masons. "With the help of God, everything may be accomplished. Nevertheless——"

"Nevertheless?" said the engineer.

" *The Honourable Engineer has forgotten the Tomb,*" said the Chief-of-the-Masons.

" The Tomb ? " questioned the engineer.

" The Honourable Engineer is a stranger in this city," answered the Chief-of-the-Masons. " Otherwise the Tomb of the blessed Guide, Sheikh Mahmoud (may God purify his clay) would not be unknown to him. It lies by the gate of Sheikh Mahmoud, directly across the line of the road which the Honourable Engineer proposes to build. Who knows ? " continued with bitterness the Chief-of-the-Masons. " Perhaps God placed it there, so that these detestable Feranghi innovations might be brought to naught. For whatever else you may demolish and cast away, be assured of this : the bones of His Holy One shall never be moved ! "

III

When, with the aid of a variety of fragrant sauces, the virginal hillocks of boiled rice had been ravished and consumed ; when a sufficient number of gobbets of grilled mutton, concealed between slabs of smoking bread, had disappeared ; when the cool, capacious bowl of sour milk-and-water had been drained with the aid of half a dozen boat-shaped wooden ladles ; when a score of dripping segments of crimson watermelon had vanished, one by one,—the engineer from Tehran invited his guests to precede him into the inner chamber. There each took up a kneeling attitude upon the carpet, and by refined and well-mannered noises of a belching nature sought to express their satisfaction at the hospitality vouchsafed.

Then Agha Seyyid Ali (called also Eye-of-Wisdom), the most distinguished among the assembled guests, made a sign to his serving man, who was waiting by the door; and soon, from the ante-room, his favourite water-pipe was produced. For a person of his consequence would hardly venture forth to after-sunset dinner during the Blessed Month unaccompanied by his favourite water-pipe. It had come packed in a leather pocket which hung securely from the saddle of his Chief of Servants.

By this time the minds of the assembled company were so filled with the consciousness of peace and well-being as to cause a lull in the conversation. Whereupon the engineer from Tehran, sensing that his principal guest, in the magnificent black turban, was pleasantly disposed towards him and to the world at large, ventured to remark:

"The meagre hospitality of your servant is unworthy of this honour. Nevertheless, the humblest morsel may become acceptable, if it be offered in the name of God."

"To us unknown provincials," replied affably the Eye-of-Wisdom, "how rarely is an opportunity accorded of edifying conversation with famous and instructed persons from the capital! Above all with those who, like the Honourable Engineer, have perfected their studies in the unrivalled universities of Feranghistan."

"In alluding to himself as an unknown provincial," replied the engineer, "the Eye-of-Wisdom is vainly attempting to drown the blare of the Trumpet of Fame with the refined music of the

thin *Tar* of Modesty. His reputation, which he esteems to be merely local, extends in reality far beyond the confines of this province. Thus he may be surprised to learn that the fame of the school of Dream Interpretation which he has founded among the learned doctors of the Mosque of Friday has long since reached the ears of instructed persons of the capital."

"I am surprised and confused," answered the Eye-of-Wisdom with becoming humility, "that the learned doctors of the capital should have deigned to take note of our inadequate inquiries into the domain of Dream Interpretation."

"It is as I have petitioned," replied the engineer. "Before starting on my journey to your agreeable city, I decided to consult a learned Mollah, one Sheikh Rahim of Shah Abd'ul Azim, about a dream which had caused me some uneasiness. For it concerned a personage of Saidabad, and I feared that it might be intended as a warning to me to desist from this journey. Happily the learned Sheikh was able to allay my fears; he recommended me to proceed in peace, and doubted not that my arrival would be fortunate. 'You will find,' he added, 'in the city of Saidabad, whither you are journeying, a learned doctor of the Mosque of Friday, who is called the Eye-of-Wisdom and who has made an illuminating study of the art of Dream Interpretation. Should you require further advice on this matter, consult him with confidence, for his knowledge of the mystic science surpasses ours as the peak of Demavend outtops the hills of the Shimran.'"

To the smile of humility of the Eye-of-Wisdom was added a deprecating gesture which denoted an unwilling acknowledgment that the remark of the engineer contained a measure of perspicacity and truth.

" This dream," inquired the Eye-of-Wisdom with professional interest, " which you say concerns a personage of Saidabad, has not by chance been repeated since your arrival in our midst ? "

" Alas ! " said the engineer distressfully. " Not once but several times. But why should I trouble this distinguished company on such an occasion with a recital of my secret distresses ? Yet perhaps the problem is of interest to the Eye-of-Wisdom and to the other learned doctors, who are all Lamps of Enlightenment ? "

" All of us who are at this moment enjoying the gracious hospitality of the Honourable Engineer," replied the Eye-of-Wisdom, " are priests and doctors of the Mosque of Friday. And all have been associated in those humble inquiries to which allusion has been made. It seems that the Honourable Engineer has an unusual experience to relate. Let him relate it openly, as a patient to his physicians. It may be that the inadequate researches of this company may bring to light a satisfactory interpretation of this dream, which is the cause of such distress to an habitually calm and undistracted mind."

The engineer paused a moment to collect his thoughts, while the assembled guests rearranged their mantles and prepared to listen.

" My friends," he began, " one night, as I lay asleep in my house in Tehran, I had a dream in

which a saintly Personage, who declared that he was a native of this city, appeared before me and complained bitterly of his estate. When I awoke, I was much concerned and puzzled, for at that time your delectable city was wholly unknown to me. Judge of my astonishment, however, when, on the very next day, I was informed by the Minister of the Public Works Department that I was to proceed without delay to Saidabad! I was so concerned at this strange coincidence that before starting on my journey I determined, as I have said, to consult one Sheikh Rahim, a learned doctor; who, when he heard my story, reassured me, saying that the dream was not unfavourable and that I should not hesitate to set out on my journey.

"But on the very night of my arrival in this city, no sooner had sleep taken possession of my faculties than the Personage again appeared before me. He was of saintly aspect; his beard was of a silvery whiteness; he wore the turban of one who has performed the sacred pilgrimage; and in his hand he held a copy of the Word. 'Welcome to Saidabad,' said he, 'O Ibrahim, my deliverer.' 'O Blessed One,' I replied, prostrating myself before the saint, 'tell your unworthy slave what dangers or discomforts threaten you, and, by the justice of God, I will deliver you from them all.'

"Thereupon the saint lifted me by the hand and said: 'Listen, O Ibrahim. I, whom thou seest, am Sheikh Mahmoud, whom men call Saint, Guide and Holy One. For five generations I have lain in a small chapel, over against the city gate, which is named after me. But no rest have I found there;

day after day, from the first streak of dawn until far into the night, the noises of the passers-by, the cries of street vendors, the wrangling of barterers, distract me; I hear the booming and jangling of bells, the braying of mules and asses, the grunting of camels, the cries of the muleteers and camel-drivers; at night I hear the howl of the jackal and the laugh of the hyena without the city wall. As the generations pass, the noises multiply. O Ibrahim, I desire to lie in a place of quietude. Seek out for me, O my son, a secluded corner in this the city of my birth, where I may rest in peace and hear only the call to prayer and the voices of the Faithful.' With that he disappeared, and I awoke, aghast at the reality of the vision.

"My friends," continued the engineer, "this is not all. Since I arrived in this auspicious city, three times has the holy Sheikh Mahmoud appeared to me. Three times, repeating each time his piteous appeal. I have spent my days wandering about the city, seeking for a peaceful and secluded spot, where the Blessed Saint might rest. Until yesterday, I despaired of finding it. Then, happening at the hour of the third prayer to enter the courtyard of the Mosque of Friday, I was attracted by a pathway which led under an arch adorned with a sacred inscription in tiles of black and yellow. Beneath the arch was a small door. It led into a delightful courtyard surrounded by a high wall. In the centre of the courtyard was a brimming tank, and on either side of the tank a row of dark cypresses; these were so elegantly placed that the slender beauty of each one was reflected separately in the still water."

"The Prince of blessed memory who, many generations ago, built the Mosque of Friday," interrupted the Eye-of-Wisdom, "intended to erect a tomb in this courtyard for himself and his favourite wife. But having departed on a pilgrimage to Kerbela, he died there and was buried near the sacred shrine. And the woman married another. So that the courtyard has remained unoccupied ever since."

"Perhaps," said the engineer thoughtfully, "this blessed spot has been preserved and set aside to harbour at last the sacred dust of the Blessed Saint and Guide, Sheikh Mahmoud."

"That may be," answered the Eye-of-Wisdom cautiously, "if, as I anticipate, our interpretation of the singular dreams of the Honourable Engineer confirms his supposition of their meaning."

"May I without offending suggest," said the engineer, "that if the bones of Sheikh Mahmoud are removed to this place, honour beyond computation will be added to the Mosque of Friday? And you, my friends," he continued with enthusiasm, "who are priests and doctors of the mosque, will become known throughout this province, nay, throughout all Iran, as Guardians of the Blessed Tomb! Under your fostering care it will become a shrine and a place of pilgrimage for thousands! Who can compute the total of the votive offerings which will flow into the treasury of the Mosque of Friday—for the alleviation of the sufferings of the poor?"

"There is no doubt," replied the Eye-of-Wisdom with more affability, "that the removal of the bones

of the Blessed Guide from their present lamentable site to the holy precincts of the mosque would add a certain lustre to an already famous foundation. And it is reasonable to suppose that the Tomb, under our care, would acquire renown as a place of pilgrimage. Again, it may be conceded that the more apprehensive or the more fortunate pilgrims would open for us the hand of generosity—for the alleviation of the sufferings of the poor. All these things may be conceded; but the difficulty of persuading the people of Saidabad to consent to the removal of the bones of the justly revered Hajji Sheikh Mahmoud remains to be resolved."

"That difficulty," answered the engineer, "has by no means been lost sight of. If, for instance, it should become known that the Blessed Guide has appeared in a dream on several occasions to a person of note in the city and complained of his distressful state, begging to be removed to the quiet courtyard adjoining the mosque; and if," added affably the engineer, "the blessed Guide should by good fortune appear to one or two of the assembled company as well—and this also should become known; is there any doubt that in a few days He will appear to a hundred persons more? And then surely the good people of Saidabad would not permit their justly revered Saint to endure His vexations a day longer!"

"The Honourable Engineer has spoken with singular discernment," answered the Eye-of-Wisdom, after an adequate pause. "The Saint might indeed appear to one or two of the assembled company; whereupon the circumstance will certainly

be made known. And then doubtless everything will take place as the Honourable Engineer has suggested."

" May it be added," said the engineer, " that His Illustrious Presence, the Preserver-of-the-Kingdom, is desirous, with us, that the distresses of the saint be terminated at an early date? He has desired me also to make, on his behalf, a small contribution to the treasury of the mosque—for the alleviation of the sufferings of the poor. He also desires it to be known that a new and elegant shrine with a dome of blue tile-work will be erected in the court-yard at his charges, beyond, and in alignment with, the tank of water; so that the reverent pilgrims, entering the courtyard beneath the arch, will see, beyond the brimming tank, between a double row of slender cypresses, a turquoise dome under which will rest for ever the Blessed Saint and Guide, Sheikh Mahmoud, whose clay is purified and who will there find peace."

The Eye-of-Wisdom nodded sagely in acquiescence and observed:

" The Chief-of-the-Masons informed us that the Honourable Engineer had proposed to build an avenue through the town; he added, moreover, that the project had been abandoned because of an unforeseen obstacle. Now, however——"

" Now," interrupted with extreme affability the engineer, " since, with the assistance of the discerning Eye-of-Wisdom, the obstacle is to be happily removed, the project will be carried out. On the first of the New Year the avenue will be opened. Then the good people of Saidabad will

forget the annoyances to which they have been subjected in the joy of moving easily and freely through their city. Doubtless," continued the engineer thoughtfully, " in the scheme of things there is a place for the saint as well as for the engineer. Yet, more and more, in this old country, they will meet and perhaps interfere—— "

" Whereupon," interrupted with a smile of tolerance and understanding the Eye-of-Wisdom, " the engineer, whose skill and address as a remover of unforeseen obstacles is unsurpassed, will devise for the bewildered Saint a way of dignified withdrawal."

THE RAVINE

THEY saw, ahead of them fringing the tawny desert, a thin line of green. Because they could discover no poplars pencilled against the evening sky, the green line could not be, they thought, a village. As the wagon lumbered forward they distinguished, at last, what seemed to them to be the tops of trees peeping over the edge of a ravine. Trees! That meant water, coolness, rest! They went forward with lightened hearts; until they reached, at last, the edge of a stupendous furrow, cut clean, as it were, by some gigantic ploughman, across the dun, illimitable plain.

They looked with greedy eyes over a sea of tree-tops. The ravine was perhaps two hundred yards across, with steep, almost vertical sides. Years ago some chieftain, because he had found water there and because the soil was good, had planted it with poplars; and to-day, up and down, as far as eye could see, there stretched across the bare, forbidding desert this green zone of trees.

The track plunged, almost vertically, to the green bottom. The horses, harnessed four abreast, paused irresolutely on the brink. Paused, but only for a second. They knew, poor chastened animals, that a place of trees at sunset meant for them rest and the content of food and water. They sank half-down upon their haunches, stiffened out their forelegs

and began, warily, to slide. Half-way to the bottom, they could hold the wagon back no longer; so they leapt forward at full speed, to escape its onrush. On the soft, level sward which carpeted the floor of the ravine, they pulled the wagon up with ease.

Then the driver, a tall, swarthy Caucasian, clad in a jerkin of brown cloth, a yellow sheepskin cap, and boots that came well up over his knees, jumped down and began, in a precise yet leisurely manner, to undo the traces. From a miscellaneous collection of properties touching the care of horses, he produced a square hammock which he slung between the pole of the wagon and a poplar tree. Into this hammock he emptied chaff from a huge sack; the horses buried their noses in the vapid straw as if it were the rarest-scented timothy.

Meanwhile Rahman, the cook, the Tehrani—for do not all the best cooks come from Tehran?—had lifted from the wagon a square box which held his mysteries. Opening it, he produced a bag of charcoal and a samovar which, before long, was droning out its comfortable, immemorial hymn.

Then he made a fire of dried twigs between two stones set against a low bank of sward; and over the fire he placed an iron tripod from his box of properties; and on that the copper cooking-pot which held boiled rice enough for Sah'b and servants.

Meanwhile, Habib, butler and body-servant, had carpeted a square of greensward with old rugs; and on these had laid as white a tablecloth as ever one would see in West Kensington. This he garnished with shining cutlery and china, a platter of thin Persian bread and jars of butter and wild honey.

Baxter, seated on the ground with his back against a tree, viewed contentedly these preparations. It pleased him that his servants gave evidence of such efficiency. They robbed him on the buying, of course. But, after all, it was worth it ; the rascals knew their business. Rahman was the best cook in Hamadan, and Habib——

Baxter considered Habib. With the air of one performing a high sacerdotal rite, his servant bore aloft by its curling ears the steaming samovar, and placed it, as on an altar, upon the spread, immaculate cloth. Then he approached and waited obsequiously, before delivering that familiar message :

" Sah'b, a petition is made. Tea is ready."

Baxter examined his watch : it was barely twenty minutes since they had reached their camping ground. Truly, as a road servant, Habib approached perfection.

Baxter rose, stretched his limbs, and walked to where the tea was laid. He sat down cross-legged upon the carpet, while Habib poured out and handed him a welcome cup. He lifted it to his lips and sipped a first mouthful ; then stopped and looked over the shoulder of the bending servant at the trees beyond.

A man was advancing towards him from behind a thicket : a tall, swarthy, black-eyed man, dressed in the picturesque costume of a Kurdish chieftain. Baxter noted the sash wound half a dozen times about his middle ; the black hat, shaped like a huge peg-top, and bound round loosely with a silken scarf ; the wide black trousers, flapping round the ankles ; the bright cartridges in rows across his

breast; lastly, the rifle, of quite modern pattern, carried carelessly in the hollow of his arm.

Baxter's hand slipped to his hip-pocket. But the stranger did not stop or alter the position of his gun. Instead, he smiled and lifted a deprecating hand.

"It is better not, Sah'b. There are twenty-five men behind those trees. You and all your servants are covered. Come; give me a cup of tea. By the Rivers of Paradise, I am tired."

He advanced, still smiling. Baxter shrugged his shoulders and threw his revolver on the ground. "In the name of God," he said, pointing to the samovar and tea-things.

The stranger stepped forward to the carpet, slipped off his shoes, and sat down Persian fashion, with his feet drawn under him. Habib waited, impassive, for a sign.

"Bring tea," said Baxter.

Habib understood this to mean that the usages of hospitality were to be extended to the stranger. He proffered him a glass of tea set on a saucer, with two lumps of sugar at the side. The stranger took the proffered cup, placed a lump of sugar between his teeth, and sipped his tea through it with noisy satisfaction.

Meanwhile Baxter was weighing his chances. He remembered with gloom that no Persian bandit will take the offensive with odds of less than five to one. He decided that the game was up. It meant the loss of all his kit and a day's march, at worst, naked and barefoot. He knew that if he made no resistance there was no risk of life. He remembered that

the peculiarly Balkan mode of brigandage, which consists in carrying off the victim and holding him for ransom, had not yet penetrated into the wilds of Persia.

The stranger pointed to himself. "I am Reza Khan," said he with a shade of bravado.

Baxter succeeded in suppressing his surprise. "I am Baxter Sah'b," said he calmly, "of Hamadan." He bowed and added: "The fame of the deeds of Reza Khan has reached me." Then he looked hard at the bandit and said: "You know, before I set out on my journey, I inquired about you from Fazlullah Khan, the chief of the gendarmes; he swore to me that you were on the other side of the mountains!"

Reza Khan laughed delightedly. "By his calculations I am most certainly on the other side of the mountains at this moment! The calculations of Fazlullah Khan are accurate, but sometimes a little out of date." He placed another lump of sugar between his teeth, sipped audibly his tea and continued between the swallows: "If they want to catch Reza Khan, they will have to send someone else. There was once an officer—a Swede—he could have done it. But the Swedes went back to their country, for which God be praised."

"Alas for Fazlullah Khan!" said Baxter. "What can a wretched Soltan of gendarmes and a townsman do against a child of warriors and mountaineers?"

"What, indeed?" answered Reza Khan. "He is a worthy man, but—is it not so?—too fat. The Government should give a man of his girdle an easier task; they might send him, for instance, against

Naib Hossein of Kashan." Reza Khan glanced sideways at Baxter to see if he had caught the allusion : the mettle of the men of Kashan has been a subject of jibes since classic times. " Baxiter Sah'b," he continued eagerly, " did you see Fazlullah Khan at the races ? By his calculations, I should have been in the Mehriban at that time ; instead of which, I was on the racecourse, watching him. I went there purposely to see him ride. What shall I say ? It was a derision ! He was trying to urge his horse into line at the starting-point ; but the poor animal wanted only to go back to its stable. Can you wonder, with that lump of fat on its back ? I laughed so loudly at this spectacle that it was a scandal. I said to myself, ' Reza, peace ; if you laugh like that you will be discovered.' " He drained his glass, placed it on the brass tray which Habib held for him, and continued : " Have you seen him shoot ? By the Rivers of Paradise, it is a spectacle ! The least among my followers, firing at full gallop, can hit a bottle ; yet this man would miss a mountain at fifty paces."

" I am reminded," said Baxter, " of the story of the lion : A lion, who had been pursuing a fox without success, exclaimed : ' I am the King of Beasts, yet this rat has eluded me ! ' Whereupon the owl, who is a mocker, answered him, ' Why are you distressed ? If he has not provided you with a meal, you have at least provided him with an entertainment. Be satisfied.' "

Reza Khan laughed. He took a second glass of tea which Habib proffered him, drank it down, and rose to his feet. " Well, we have drunk our tea ;

now we must look to our affairs." He placed his right hand on his breast and bowed. "Truly, it grieves me to cause your Honour such a headache; but you see, each of us has his own way of living. I have heard of Baxiter Sah'b. They say that he buys carpets from the villagers for a few krans and sells them in Frangistan for ten times what they cost. It must be so, otherwise why should he leave his own country?" He laughed again, and waving an arm, shouted, "Come!" in the direction of the trees.

In a trice the peaceful clearing was filled with advancing figures, clad, though less ornately, in the same picturesque costume as their chief. The breast of each man was covered, as with a cuirass, with a huge bandolier of cartridges. Every man carried a rifle; some of these were of modern pattern; most were of the period of the Victorian wars; and there were a few pieces fashioned by the deft hands of Eastern armourers, of great length and leanness.

The bandits crowded round them. Swiftly and with eager curiosity, they seized upon Baxter's kit, opened the bags and scattered upon the ground his articles of clothing and travel. His revolver and shotgun were passed eagerly from hand to hand; their breech-locks were opened and snapped; their workmanship and balance scrutinised and tested by twenty experts. With a shout of delight, one of the band discovered, on the hip of the tall Caucasian, a huge Mauser pistol, which was instantly annexed.

The curiosity of his band having been satisfied, Reza Khan gave a staccato order. Instantly the

bandits began to collect the scattered articles, and to throw them, pell-mell, into the bags again. Two of them led off the horses, while the rest started to carry away the spoil.

The whole operation was carried through with such swiftness that within twenty minutes of the advent of the band, nothing was left to Baxter but the empty wagon.

When the last of the band had disappeared, Reza Khan turned again to Baxter :

" Sah'b, I beg you now to command my departure. May the remainder of your journey be free from the trials and uncertainties which are so often, alas, the accompaniment of travel ! "

He placed his hand upon his breast again and bowed with the ease and elegance of a child of forty kings—which, indeed, he may have been.

II

Dawn was breaking in the ravine—still, serene, windless. Baxter shivered.

Throughout the night he had kept the bitter cold at bay by tramping, between snatches of sleep, back and forth across the clearing, swinging his arms continually across his chest.

At last, in the East the sky had become luminous, but the imminent sun had not yet begun to whiten the tops of the poplar-trees. At the far end of the clearing he could distinguish the figures of his sleeping servants huddled together for warmth. He thought, " If we start now, we might reach a village before noon."

He was about to call the sleepers when a sound—

thin, distant, yet unmistakable—broke the magic stillness of the ravine. It was as if, almost out of earshot, someone had struck a table five times sharply with a mallet.

He sat up and listened. The five blows of the mallet were repeated; then followed a continuous distant rattle, as of many mallets striking. Then, on a sudden, the rattle was taken up from another part of the ravine.

He jumped to his feet, crossed over to where his three servants were lying, and shook them, every one.

"Rise," said he. "There is firing down there."

The last act of the Persians on the previous night had been to place their balloon-shaped hats beside them on the ground. Now, before rising, almost before waking, they grabbed their hats and set them firmly on their shaven crowns; because it is not meet that a man be seen with head uncovered. As for the tall Caucasian driver, he had slept in his sheepskin hat, so there was nothing for him to do but, like a dog, to rise and shake himself.

Habib ventured an explanation. "It seems that what they took from us last night is not enough; they must be plundering a caravan down there."

The tall Caucasian listened attentively; then with authority born of rich experience he said: "It is as I thought; the firing is from above; there are at least fifty rifles. I would wager my Mauser pistol—only one of those dogs has taken it—that it is they who are being attacked this time."

"We must find out what is going on," said Baxter. Walking warily where the trees were

thickest, he led the way in the direction of the firing.

They had proceeded cautiously for half a mile, when the tall Caucasian seized Baxter's arm. They listened.

"Horses?" said Baxter.

"It is as I thought," muttered the tall Caucasian. "Come; we must get out of their way."

They turned off quickly, towards the side of the ravine, and plunged into a close thicket of poplar saplings.

By this time they could clearly hear the thud of horses' hoofs, and the crackle of breaking undergrowth. Of a sudden, a Kurd, bending low over his horse's neck, passed them at full gallop. Then another. Then half a dozen more. Before long the whole band had galloped by. Last of all, seated on a superb white horse, rode that redoubtable bandit, Reza Khan.

"Twenty-six," muttered the tall Caucasian. "It is as I thought. They have not lost a man."

When the sound of horses' hoofs had died away they issued from their hiding-place. "Come," said the Caucasian, "let us see how much of our properties we can recover before it is too late. Those sons of burnt fathers could not have taken much away. But there are others. Let us hasten."

They continued their way down the ravine. In a few moments they caught sight of figures moving among the trees. "Gendarmes," muttered the tall Caucasian. "It is as I thought. Put up your hands. It is true that they can never hit anything; yet, perhaps, by chance——"

A rifle cracked from among the trees, and far

above their heads a bullet sang. The tall Caucasian waved an arm. They continued their advance.

They were approaching a clearing which had been the robbers' camping ground. The grass had been well trodden by the feet of men and horses. Here and there smouldered the black remnants of camp fires. At the farther end they saw a crowd of gendarmes, clad in faded blue cotton uniforms, canvas shoes which had once been white, and frayed, disjointed puttees. They were crowding round some hidden objects, pushing, shouting, gesticulating.

As Baxter approached, the scrum opened and a figure issued from behind. A short, plump, round-faced figure, clad in the light-blue uniform and gold trappings of an officer of gendarmes. On his head he wore a white lambskin cap, on which blazed in brass the Lion and the Sun of Persia. Baxter held out his hand. "Fazlullah Khan!" he exclaimed.

The portly officer stepped back and surveyed with astonishment the dishevelled figure of the Englishman; then rushed forward and seized him by the hand.

"By my soul, it is the Sah'b!" he cried. "It is Baxiter Sah'b, by Imam Reza!" He patted Baxter affectionately on the shoulder. "Where have you been? What have you been doing, my Lamb? How is it that you find yourself in this condition? Come, Pupil of my Eye, let us drink a tea. Mehmed Ali, Rustem, bring tea! We are thirsty, we are hungry, by Imam Reza, after such a battle."

He led the way to another part of the clearing, where some blankets had been laid on the ground. They sat down. Beyond, Baxter saw a man busy

with a samovar. There was something familiar, he thought, in its full, voluted side and the set of its curling ear. And when, a few minutes later, tea was served in cups instead of little glasses, they were of a pattern which he thought he knew.

When they were seated Baxter turned to his deliverer. "You arrived at good need, Fazlullah Khan. Last night, when I reached this ravine, I walked like a blind man into the arms of these robbers. Almost before one could utter a salutation, they had taken everything we had, except a piece of bread. I am truly indebted to you for our deliverance, and I rejoice that your brave gendarmes have recovered——"

"Between friends," interrupted Fazlullah Khan hastily, "between friends, Baxiter Sah'b, there can be no talk of indebtedness." He glanced anxiously over his shoulder towards that portion of the camp where, a few minutes before, a crowd of gendarmes had been busy, seemingly, with their impedimenta. Now everything was cleared away, and the crowd had disappeared. "By Imam Reza! A battle to rejoice the heart of a soldier!" he exclaimed with more assurance. "Conceived with boldness, executed with discretion." He tapped his breast significantly with his hand.

"It was indeed an operation of a commander of courage and resource," said Baxter. "Meanwhile, if you would be good enough to give orders that my effects——"

Fazlullah Khan lifted a goodly hand in protest. "Listen, Baxiter Sah'b: four days ago my spies in Tusirkhan informed me that Reza Khan was riding

towards Kermanshah. When I heard that, I thought: 'When he is an hour on the road, he will double, he will turn north. Where will he go?' I considered the map. 'In three days,' I said, 'he will ride thirty farsakhs.' I took my compass, and traced an arc of a circle thirty farsakhs towards the north. 'On this line,' I said, 'I will find him.' But where? A voice whispered to me, 'The Ravine of Poplars.' There are still commanders, by Imam Reza, who can understand that which is hidden in the heart of the enemy." Again he tapped his breast lightly with his hand. "I gave orders that each horse should receive an extra feed of barley. In two hours I was in the saddle with my brave fifty at my side. We rode far into the night. The next day we rode ten farsakhs; yesterday, we rode ten more. They were so tired, the horses, that it was a distress to see them. Yet I was eager to reach the Ravine, for a voice whispered to me, 'He is there.' I left my brave gendarmes and rode forward, alone, in the darkness. At three hours after sunset, I reached the edge of the Ravine. What did I see? Fires, camp fires among the trees! What a fool was Reza Khan to light camp fires, with Fazlullah upon his track! I rode back to my brave gendarmes. I said, 'He is there!' They were astonished. My staff was amazed. I said: 'The horses are weary; we will leave them; we will march to the Ravine and attack at daybreak.'"

Fazlullah Khan rose, walked over to a pile of knapsacks which lay on the ground near by and selected from them a sizable canvas bag, which appeared full and weighty. He bore it back to

where Baxter was sitting and lifting it from the bottom, emptied its contents at Baxter's feet. A stream of empty brass cartridge shells rolled out on the ground before him. Baxter remembered that in a country where ammunition is scarce, the wise commander collects his empty shells and has them refilled against future encounters.

"Behold," said Fazlullah Khan, gesturing proudly with outstretched hand. "One thousand, three hundred and fifty-seven cartridges! Every one was fired in the battle!"

"The slaughter must have been fearful," said Baxter gloomily.

Fazlullah Khan laughed, the grim laugh of a man of war. He shrugged his shoulders: "We buried ten early this morning," he said calmly.

"May they receive mercy," said Baxter. "Did they leave many wounded on your hands?"

"That is not the custom of the Kurds," Fazlullah Khan answered. "They carry off their wounded across their saddles."

"The casualties among your brave gendarmes were not heavy?" inquired Baxter anxiously.

"Peh!" answered Fazlullah Khan with scorn. "If any man should say to you that a Kurd can hit a mountain at fifty paces, call him a liar. Except for Sheer Ali, the son of Abbas, whose eye was blown out by the explosion of his musket, we had no casualties, thanks be to God."

"Thanks be to God," echoed Baxter fervently. "Touching this bandit, Reza Khan," he continued. "As I was about to tell you, I walked into his camp last night unawares. Before you arrived

with your valiant army, he had robbed me of everything I possessed."

"That was indeed a calamity," answered Fazlullah Khan, with feeling. "I am filled with sorrow at your misfortune. Let me lend you a horse and a great-coat, so that you may pursue your journey without discomfort."

"Thank you," answered Baxter. "It occurred to me, however," he added faintly, "that in the robbers' camp you might, perhaps, have discovered——"

"Nothing," interrupted Fazlullah Khan with decision. "Not a needle! The dogs' sons left nothing behind."

"It is as I thought," muttered the tall Caucasian, who was standing near. "We arrived too late. For the robber there is the gendarme; but for the gendarme, who is there?"

DAVIDSON

I

The gilt badge which blazed from the black balloon hat of the liveried gentleman, proclaimed him a servitor of the Grand Hotel of Paris. To avoid misunderstanding, let it be added that this Grand Hotel of Paris was not that vast hospice of the Rue Scribe, but a lesser caravanserai, situated on a humbler avenue, in a city which is called the Abode of Felicity, the Footsteps of the Throne of the King of Kings.

The liveried servant crossed his hands over an ample abdomen, concealing, to denote respect, his fingers in his sleeves, bowed from the waist, straightened himself, cleared his throat, and began :

" The proprietor of the House of Guests of Paris sends to the Doctor Sah'b his salutations. He petitions that there is a guest who is unwell. Would the Doctor Sah'b give himself the trouble to look at him ? Should the proprietor of the House of Guests be out when the Doctor Sah'b brings His Honour, the number of the room is thirty-one."

Dr. Morrison, responding to a habit contracted before a surprising concatenation of events landed him in a country where time is a perplexity and dates a hazard, consulted his engagement-book.

" Tell the proprietor that I will come this evening

at an hour before sunset." And to his list of engagements for the day he added : " Seven p.m., Hôtel de Paris, Room Thirty-one."

At seven p.m. precisely, Dr. Morrison stepped out of his two-horse phaeton and entered the lobby of the Grand Hotel of Paris. Its well-worn carpets, its gilded mirrors, tarnished and fly-specked, its sombre, grimy hangings, its grotesque furniture upholstered in red plush, detained him not at all. He inquired abruptly from an obsequious servant if the master of the house was in. The master of the house was not in. Dr. Morrison, with the assurance of a friend of the establishment, walked through the lobby, opened the glass door at the end, and passed through it into a square courtyard paved with brick. Two galleries of pointed arches, one above the other, surrounded the courtyard. The lower gallery gave access to the rooms on the ground-floor, the upper to the rooms above. Dr. Morrison examined the number on the door nearest to him, and finding that it was of low denomination, he concluded that Number 31 must be on the upper floor. He mounted the stairs, therefore, and walked briskly along the upper gallery, scanning, one after another, the numbers on the doors. Before Number 31 he stopped, examined once more his note-book to make sure that there was no mistake, then knocked decisively.

There was no response.

It occurred to Dr. Morrison that his prospective patient might be asleep ; he knocked again, more loudly. Again there was no response.

Dr. Morrison was not a man to be daunted by so

weak a fortalice as this. He took hold of the little brass door-knob and turned it. The door was unlocked. He opened it and entered.

When a doctor enters a bedroom, he looks towards the bed. Dr. Morrison looked towards the bed. Lying upon it was the figure of a man in dress shirt and black trousers. One arm was thrown above his head, and one leg was drawn up and hung, loosely, over the other. Something in the man's position caused the doctor to take three steps across the room and to apply his ear, without more ado, to the man's heart.

"Dead," said Dr. Morrison.

Then he looked at the man's face. It was the face of a man of thirty or thirty-five. A small, whimsical, rather weak face.

Swiftly, systematically, Dr. Morrison examined the man's body for signs of violence. There were none. Then he gave a glance round the room. The first thing that caught his eye was an empty whisky-bottle standing on the dressing-table. He found two more in the empty closet. That directed his diagnosis.

"Poor fellow!" said Dr. Morrison.

Dr. Morrison considered what he should do next. The man was certainly a stranger. The doctor, who went everywhere and saw everybody in that small, distant, isolated community, had not met him or heard of him. Was he an Englishman? Dr. Morrison doubted that. His narrow, two-buttoned shirt-front, the cut of his dinner-jacket, which hung over the back of a chair, gave no hint of London. His shoes—"Ah," thought Dr. Morrison, "show

me a man's shoes—this is clearly a case for Ziegler."

Dr. Morrison opened the door of Number 31, walked out, locked the room after him, and put the key in his pocket. In a minute he was in his phaeton. He addressed the coachman on the box. "To the house of Ziegler Sah'b, the Consul of America."

II

"The Consul Sah'b," said the chief of the servants of the household of Mr. Ziegler, "is dining."

"It is no matter," answered the doctor, who enjoyed the privileges of a constant visitor.

The doctor did not wait to be announced. He walked rapidly along the verandah towards the open doorway of the dining-room.

The pristine Nebraskan raciness of Mr. Consul Ziegler had been so tempered by long sojourn in distant and cosmopolitan localities that not even his most intimate friends believed but that he came from Boston. Indeed, he sometimes doubted his Nebraskan rudiment himself.

A final mouthful of his favourite Martini was satisfying the instructed palate of Mr. Ziegler when the dapper figure of the doctor appeared between him and the setting sun.

Mr. Ziegler made as if to rise.

"Don't get up, don't get up," said Dr. Morrison. "Go on with your dinner, I pray."

"Have a chair," said Mr. Ziegler urbanely. "Have a gin and vermouth. My dear fellow, have anything you like. Have a peg. Say when."

"Whisky," mused Dr. Morrison. "Whisky." He regarded with critical eye the amber liquid in his glass. "Tell me, Ziegler, have you ever known a citizen of the Republic to die from drinking whisky?"

"Not recently," said Ziegler. "Since my countrymen embarked upon the perilous seas of self-denial they find that whisky, as a way of pleasant death, is too expensive. They drink wood alcohol instead. Though not as palatable, it is surer. Try this *pilau*. I have a cook, Morrison, a Tabrizi—four hundred lashes on the feet shall not wring from me his name—who has mastered the mysteries of the nine-and-ninety sauces which, it is ordained, shall be eaten with boiled rice. For three months he has placed before me nightly a peerless white mountain of *pilau*; and, beside it, a perfumed bowl of one of the nine-and-ninety. Never once has he repeated himself, wonderful man! This, Morrison, is his eighty-seventh effort. Do you catch the aroma? The ineffable scent? When I consider, my friend, that I, a miserably paid servant of a heartless Government, may at any moment be transferred to—where shall we say?—Pernambuco, the Cameroons, Foochow?—and that I shall have to abandon my Tabrizi, his virginal *pilaus*, and his nine-and-ninety sauces, I am undone, Morrison, I am undone."

Dr. Morrison took up the thread of his remarks. "Ziegler, I came in to tell you that an American is lying dead at the Grand Hotel."

"Dead?" exclaimed Mr. Ziegler. "An American?"

"They are not immortal," said Dr. Morrison.

"I am inclined to think," continued the doctor, "that an overdose of whisky was the occasion of death, and a weak heart the cause. The proprietor sent me a message this afternoon that one of his guests was unwell. I did not gather that it was a serious case. I called at seven. The man was dead. Anyhow, I could have done nothing for him. I dropped in to tell you that I thought——"

"Come along," cried Ziegler, pushing his friend through the door.

The doctor's phaeton drew up once more before the glaring mantle lamp which, now that darkness had set in, illuminated the threshold of the Grand Hotel of Paris.

A tall, flaxen-haired gentleman, who was partaking of a lonely meal in the dining-room, observed the doctor and the consul to pass rapidly through the lobby and disappear through the glass doors into the courtyard beyond.

Dr. Morrison produced from his pocket the key and handed it to Mr. Ziegler. This was an official matter, and it behoved him to adopt a correct procedure. Mr. Ziegler unlocked the door, turned the handle, and led the way into the chamber of death. He switched on the light and advanced towards the bed.

"Good God! Davidson!" exclaimed Mr. Ziegler.

"Davidson?" inquired Dr. Morrison, with lifted eyebrows. "And who the devil is Davidson?"

Mr. Ziegler opened his lips as if to answer, and then for a moment hesitated, nonplussed.

"The fact is, Morrison," he said at length, "I

haven't the remotest idea." He paused to recollect his data, and proceeded. "A few days ago I happened to drop in here, and saw a stranger standing at the bar. He was evidently a countryman of mine, so I went up to him and introduced myself, adding that if the consulate could be of service to him, he must let me know. He was an American all right, but he received my advances—shall I say coldly?—no, not coldly; shyly, rather. He seemed disinclined to talk. Did you ever meet an American who was disinclined to talk, Morrison? He drank three cocktails, one after another, as we stood there at the bar—drank them dreamily, in a detached, absent-minded way. Heaven knows how many more he had drunk before I came. Yet he was not in the least merry, or loquacious, or self-satisfied. Not at all. He was shy, silent, diffident. There was something about the man that one liked. Was it his shyness, I wonder? Or was it—yes, it was his smile. I remember thinking, as I left the hotel: 'What the devil can a man with a smile like that be doing in this town? In this town, where everybody smiles, and everybody is a villain!' I asked his name as we parted, and he said simply, 'Davidson.' But who he was, or what brought him here, instead of to Abyssinia or to Paraguay, I haven't the faintest idea. Poor fellow! I shall have to go through his papers and get into touch with his people and let them know."

He took up from the dressing-table the dead man's pocket-book and opened it. It contained bank-notes, English and Persian. He counted them over and entered the amount in a note-book of his own.

Then he picked up from the table a ring with keys on it and unlocked the single leather trunk which stood against the wall. He emptied it, laying the articles one by one beside him on the floor.

" No papers ? " said Morrison.

" Can't find any," Ziegler answered, nonplussed. He put back the pile of clothes and locked the trunk again. " It's damned funny. There's not a letter or paper anywhere."

" Passport ? " said Morrison.

" No," said Ziegler.

" That's odd," said Morrison. " Try his pockets."

The consul searched the pockets of the dead man's jacket, which hung over a chair. They were empty.

" Very strange," said Ziegler.

Then they searched the room through, Dr. Morrison taking a hand this time. Nothing.

" What we need is a drink," said Ziegler. " Let's go down and talk it over."

They locked the room and went downstairs.

A tall, flaxen-haired man was standing at the bar when they entered.

" Hullo, Watson," said Dr. Morrison. The flaxen-haired man nodded and turned to the consul.

" I say, Ziegler," said Watson, in his slow, matter-of-fact way, " I met a countryman of yours here the other evening ; a shy, silent person he was. We had a couple of short drinks at the bar—three, maybe. He seemed a lonely sort, so I asked him to dine with me here to-night. I strolled round at eight o'clock, but he wasn't about ; so I hung around for half an hour. As he didn't turn up, I sent a

servant to his room. The man came back and said that the Sah'b had locked his door and gone out. Pretty cool I call it, what? Either he's a bounder, or else he was so full of gin-and-bitters the other night that he remembered nothing about it the next morning."

"His name?" said Ziegler.

"Davidson," answered Watson.

"There is a very good reason why Mr. Davidson failed to keep his engagement with you," said Ziegler gravely. "Mr. Davidson is dead."

"Good God!" cried Watson, setting down his glass.

"Died of heart-disease this evening," said Dr. Morrison, "while he was dressing to dine with you."

"Good God!" said Watson again. "I say, is there anything a man can do?"

"Do you know who he is?" said Ziegler.

"I? I never set eyes on the fellow until last night. And he wasn't the kind who tells you a lot about himself in the first five minutes. Dead. Well—I'm—jiggered."

Ziegler held a perfunctory inquest. Morrison testified that death had resulted from disease of the heart. They buried him in the treeless Armenian cemetery outside the town.

After that, Ziegler instituted an inquiry. The man, it appeared, had turned up at the Grand Hotel a few days before. He had come up from the south. Ziegler traced him back, southward, to Qum; traced him, not without difficulty, farther southward, to Kashan; traced him, after weeks of patient search, still farther southward, to Yezd. And there lost

him. It seemed as if the vast deserts of the south had swallowed up his tracks.

Then Ziegler, who was a man of feeling, with an eye for a situation, said :

" He must have a stone. It shall be formless," he said, " to symbolise the vagueness, the uncertainty of life."

From a dry river-bed he caused a sizable boulder of grey granite to be haled. And an Armenian stonemason graved on a smooth place on it the name—

DAVIDSON

That was all there was to say.

SANCTUARY

CARELESSLY, the tall gentleman in the emerald sash —that mark of holy lineage—flung to the floor a rug which he had carried in over his shoulder. Baxter glanced at it out of the corner of his eye, but went on writing.

The tall gentleman drew, with deliberation, from the folds of his emerald sash, a pipe of red clay, with a wooden stem shaped like a thick pencil. Exploring again the recesses of his green zone, he produced a little oblong box of black *papier mâché*. From this he poured into the red bowl of his pipe a yellow stream of the broken leaves of Kurdish tobacco. He then went down on his haunches, lit a match and began to smoke, with slow, noisy aspirations. Baxter went on writing.

When the tall man had finished his pipe, he knocked the bowl on the brick floor of the verandah, rose, and announced coldly, in Persian :

" I have brought a rug."

Baxter looked up from his desk : he had won the first round.

" Behold," said the tall gentleman, superbly gesturing at the rug with outstretched hand. " A rug of Kurdistan—thin, like a handkerchief."

It was of the kind called Senneh, after the little town in Persian Kurdistan, where it was woven. Years ago, a dusky Kurdish maiden, seeking a design,

had looked into a garden; and then had woven, on a field of sea-blue, a pattern of pink roses.

"How much?" said Baxter.

The gentleman in the emerald sash answered, carelessly, as if he were flinging a coin to a beggar: "A hundred tomans."

"If you throw a stone," Baxter murmured, apropos of nothing, "throw far."

"By the holy Abbas," cried the tall Seyyid, "I have not thrown any stone." He caught up the rug violently and held it before the Sah'b. "Touch! It is as smooth as a velvet of Kashan."

At this point, approached sedately Sattar Khan, the Official Broker of the Kompani. The tall gentleman turned to him with passion:

"Sattar Khan, you are one who understands of carpets. I have said a hundred tomans. Before God, have I said too much?"

Sattar Khan, a tall, black-bearded figure in a flowing robe, stood erect, one foot slightly in advance of the other. He nodded his head sagely three times, but said nothing.

"By the holy Abbas——"

"Do not swear," softly interposed Sattar Khan, the Official Broker of the Kompani.

"The abode of His Exalted Presence, the Splendour-of-the-Kingdom," pursued the Seyyid with passion, "is a treasury of carpets. Yet when His Exalted Presence beheld this rug, he entreated me to sell it; saying, 'Behold, I will pay you a hundred tomans——'"

"A good price," Baxter soliloquised. "An excellent price. A price that should have been

accepted. It would not be possible for us to give so much."

"How much would it be possible for the Sah'b to give?" inquired gently the gentleman of the green sash.

The Sah'b ponders. He sees in his mind's eye, ten thousand miles away, a palace of marble, steel and plate glass, thrusting its twenty stories into the windy air. A vast concourse of mysterious beings crowds restlessly its stupendous halls. On a sudden, a gross woman, befurred and bediamonded, elbows her way through the crowd and accosts a sallow young man in a dark suit. Affairs that day have been for him meagre and ungenerous, so that, with a deportment of despair, he is waiting for the moment of emancipation, six o'clock. As she approaches, the face of the young man lights up in anticipation of a conquest. He forgets the hour and his despair. With exquisite grace, he ushers her through the jostling throng into a distant corner of the hall. He produces a key from his bosom and unlocks a dark cupboard. There lie concealed the choicest of his wares. He draws forth a slender roll. His face shines with the fire of the creative artist. He gesticulates, he expatiates, he is enchanted. Tenderly, with care, he places the roll upon the floor, and slowly, lovingly unrolls it. On a blue field, he discloses a garden of pink roses. "Behold, madam, the rug—a Royal Senneh. It was stolen out of the hareem of the Sultan of Krim, by the chief of his eunuchs. Our representative in the Orient (he rolls the word on the tongue like a chocolate-cream) secured it and smuggled it out of

the country at the peril of his life . . . five hundred dollars."

The Sah'b pondered. He said at last: "I will give seventy-five."

The Seyyid pounced upon the rug and flung it over his shoulder. He marched swiftly to the end of the verandah, stopped, turned on his heel and said with bitterness: "Had I a caravanserai which I could sell to make good the loss, I might give it for seventy-five."

Sattar Khan approached him and laid a gentle hand upon the rug. "Seventy-five tomans," he said in a honeyed voice. "It is the price, O Child of the Prophet. The just price, the acceptable price."

"If I give it for eighty," cried the tall man hotly, "may I be——"

"Do not swear," murmured softly Sattar Khan, the Official Broker of the Kompani.

Sattar Khan gently lifted the rug from the shoulder of the yielding Seyyid and turned to Baxter. "He means eighty. It is well. There is no loss." The Sah'b, with the flicker of an eyelid, signified consent.

Thereupon the passionate Seyyid received from the hand of the Sah'b a paper which occasioned him to sit on his haunches once again for half an hour, facing a dark-skinned cashier; and there to count, one by one, four hundred pieces of silver. That done, he shuffled the coin into a red bandanna handkerchief and departed.

When the Seyyid had left them, Sattar Khan, aware of the allowance due to his privileged position, laughed heartily, with wide-open mouth, revealing

splendid teeth. In his more customary attitude of decorum, these were concealed behind a wilderness of beard, dyed black with indigo and henna.

"This Seyyid is without any account," said Sattar Khan. "He buys, he sells—there is none that can sell against him. But who can say what the end will be?"

"The end," said Baxter sententiously, "will doubtless be the same for him as for the rest of us. But why do you say that, Sattar Khan?"

"Because in his business there is no account," answered Sattar Khan. "He buys for a hundred and he sells for eighty." He pointed to their recent purchase, which lay at their feet, a garden of pink roses. "That rug—I saw it in the house of Gholam the Confectioner. I offered for it eighty-five tomans. After a thousand contrivances, I understood that the Confectioner would sell it for a hundred. I did not take it. Be assured, the Seyyid has paid at least a hundred for it; perhaps more, but certainly a hundred. Yet he has sold it to us for eighty! What will be the end of this kind of business?"

Baxter had some acquaintance with the habit of embroidery of his Persian friends, with their unconscionable leaning towards high colour; but an intimacy with Sattar Khan, extending over many years, prompted him to accept at its full value any statement, however bewildering, of his vizier.

A fortnight later, when the sea-blue rug, hidden with twenty weaker brothers in a corded bale, was swinging its way westward on a grumbling camel to the sea, Sattar Khan approached the Sah'b and said:

" It is as I thought. The Seyyid has taken *bast* in the Imamzadeh Yahyia."

" He has done what ? " Baxter exclaimed.

" There is a shrine in the quarter of the Mulberry Tree," said Sattar Khan, " where lie the bones of the Honourable Yahyia, who was a holy man and the son of a holy man. In this shrine the Seyyid has taken refuge from his creditors. For many days they had been pressing him. This morning a company of them went to his shop to demand payment. Instead of giving them money or promises, he emptied upon their skirts the dust of insult. When they heard that, they understood his real situation, and guessed the plan which lay hidden in the secret recesses of his heart. Four of them ran to the shrine and waited before the gate to prevent him from entering ; but he eluded them by climbing over the wall. While he is in there, nobody, not even the Governor, can touch him."

" What will happen now ? " said Baxter.

" Eh," said Sattar Khan, " he will offer them one in ten or one in twenty, and they will gnash their teeth and entreat him to spare their wives and children. But in the end they will accept, and a priest will prepare the paper of settlement. Then the Seyyid will come out. Until then, his wife will bring him food every day and he will be quite happy."

So it befell. After a haggle of four days, the Seyyid and his creditors arrived at an understanding. He was to pay 10 per cent. and receive his discharge. But when the moment came to pay the 10 per cent. he asked for time—time, he explained,

to collect certain moneys due to him by a merchant of Kurdistan.

The creditors again wailed and gnashed their teeth. At last, to terminate a situation of despair, they agreed to pool the amounts due to them under the composition and to accept the Seyyid's note for the total, payable in thirty days. The note was made out to a merchant of repute, who agreed to collect it and divide the sum among the creditors. When at last the document embodying his discharge was signed by all, the Seyyid affixed his seal to the promissory note, and with the appropriate phrases of thanks and felicitation, he handed it over. Then, accompanied by his friends and mourning creditors, he emerged in triumph from sanctuary.

When, a month later, Sattar Khan entered the Sah'b's apartment, as was his privilege, unannounced, he closed the door after him, uttered the salutation of custom, and waited. Baxter responded to the salutation and waited in his turn.

Thereupon, Sattar Khan opened his large mouth and laughed, discovering his double row of perfect teeth. Then he said :

" That Seyyid. . . ."

" Ah ? " said Baxter.

" His note for three hundred tomans—to-day it became due."

" Yes ? " said Baxter.

" It was presented this morning."

" Yes ? " said Baxter.

" The Seyyid took it from the hand of the clerk who presented it, to examine the date and the seal."

"Yes?" said Baxter, scenting a *dénouement*.

"And then," said Sattar Khan, "suddenly, the Seyyid rolled the note into a ball, threw it into his mouth, and swallowed it."

"It will be paid in heaven," added Sattar Khan, the Official Broker of the Kompani.

POT-LUCK

FROM his seat on the box, the driver of the lumbering, antique barouche surveyed gloomily his passenger. This was a narrow-chested youth clad in the arresting garb of an Englishman; of an Englishman who, leaving for the first time his island, is determined that there shall be no doubt in the mind of any foreigner as to the country of his origin.

The driver of the lumbering, antique barouche addressed his passenger in Persian:

"Is it the desire of the Honourable Sir to make his descent at the Consulate, at the House of the Bank or at the House of the Telegraph?"

The young man in the obvious tweed suit glared and shook his head. Four days of intolerable heat, blinding sun and suffocating dust had brought him near the ragged edge of hysteria.

"What the hell do you keep on talking to me for? Can't you see that I don't understand your blithering language?" He leaned back in his seat and addressed the landscape. "Christ Almighty, what a country! What a blistering, God-forsaken country! Serves me right for coming on this wild-goose-chase. I told her how it would be. I told her—I told her——" he almost whimpered.

The driver of the lumbering, antique barouche, weary of a passenger so voluble in a foreign tongue, so ignorant of the Persian, turned his back upon the

young man. He flicked amiably his horses and those scraggy animals, sensing the proximity of corn and water, quickened their pace. Soon the carriage rattled under the archway of the Kuchan gate, bumped over the uneven paving-stones of the Khiaban and swung under another archway into the great rectangular courtyard of a caravanserai. With a sigh of thankfulness the driver deposited his passenger, with his impedimenta, on its domed verandah and there abandoned him. "One may be ignorant, without shame, of Turki—but Persian! Also, for a Sah'b, his tips—but Sah'bs are no longer what they used to be."

Irresolute, bewildered, the young man stood watching disdainfully the shiftless, disordered scene which lay before him. He had carried with him, all the way from 12 Levaine Road, Peckham, a picture of the gorgeous East. It was a picture compounded of scraps from "Chu Chin Chow" (at the Palladium, Peckham, with full West End Company), from the "Forty Thieves" (seen from dizzy heights at Drury Lane), from "The Pearl of the Seraglio" (which—did you know it?—cost a million dollars and took a whole year to produce). He was annoyed that this picture did not fit in with that which lay before him now.

Below him couched, with their contemptuous heads together and their knotted knees bent under them, grotesque, bearded, ruminating beasts. Scattered here and there about the courtyard, under the open, rainless heaven, covered with a film of dust and bits of wind-blown straw, lay clusters of square, iron-strapped bales; black tins of oil; cones

four feet tall of sugar in torn blue-paper wrappers; carpets of price carelessly roped together without so much as a piece of canvas to protect them; bundles of greasy sheepskins; chests of tea from the Indies; brown sacks which held who knows what of dirty grains or spices.

Here and there, among the couchant beasts and piles of outlandish merchandise, moved a few dark, grimy, bearded, strangely apparelled men. He did not know that they were camel-drivers: steadfast men who follow in a dumb, deliberate way, their useful calling. He shrugged his shoulders and muttered, "Lazy louts."

On the other side of the courtyard, from the velvet shadow of one of the pointed arches which supported the dome of the verandah, a man was watching, with lazy contemptuousness, the fretful figure of the stranger, surrounded by his baggage. The man was of middle height and of spare, almost asthenic build. The bones of his face, the hollows of his cheeks and temples, were well defined beneath a yellowish skin. An ancient khaki suit hung loosely on his meagre frame. He wore a battered sun-helmet and native string-soled shoes of cotton webbing. These, like his helmet, at some earlier period had been white.

Something in the young stranger's appearance seemed to awaken suddenly in the elder man a dormant curiosity; he leaned forward and watched him narrowly from across the courtyard. The examination, from that distance, left him apparently in doubt. He looked about him and considered whether, to obtain a closer view of the young man,

he should cross the square or walk round it in the shade and comparative tranquillity of the verandah. He elected to walk round; but soon changed his mind and stepped down into the courtyard. There he began to thread his way among the resting animals and heaps of corded bales. But when he was half-way across, he veered off again and took refuge in the shadow of one of the arches. From this coign he could observe the stranger closely and at his ease.

At last, as if satisfied with this scrutiny, he approached the young man, casually, unobserved; and after a moment's hesitation, accosted him in English in a timbreless voice, yet with a certain cordiality.

"This is hardly a place for a Sah'b to spend the night. You had better come with me—if you're willing to take pot-luck. I can give you a bed and a bath. You'll need it after that drive. Dust pretty bad?"

The stranger started at hearing his own tongue in such a singular place, on the lips of a person of such singular deportment.

"That's decent of you," he answered hesitatingly and a little suspiciously. Then, recollecting the horrors of his journey, he added angrily: "Dust? Well, rather. I'm choked with it. Look here." He shook the flap of his coat and raised a cloud.

"Come along, then," said the other. "Tell your servant to follow with your kit."

"I'm afraid I haven't a servant," the stranger answered a little awkwardly.

"We all begin that way," said the elder man, "but we soon get over it. You're new to Persia?"

"Yes, I suppose so. I left Askhabad four days ago. It took four days to do a hundred and eighty miles! The drivers gave me to understand that it wasn't safe to travel at night."

"They always do that," answered the other in his colourless voice. "You see, they prefer sleep to driving round those hairpin bends at night. You can't blame 'em, poor devils!"

He addressed in Persian a lusty, turbaned youth, clad in blue cotton trousers and tunic, who was looking on, with hope of profit, from the courtyard.

"Here, you! Take up Sah'b's bags."

The elder man led the way out of the great sunlit square of the caravanserai. They stepped from under the arch of its noble gateway into the most fascinating street in all Persia—the Khiaban of Meshed. Oblivious of the seething crowd, with his hands deep in the pockets of his ancient tunic, the elder man sauntered on ahead. The young man in the tweed suit, hesitating between a desire to satisfy a disdainful curiosity and the fear of losing his companion, stumbled along behind.

They had proceeded scarcely a hundred yards when the elder man turned off abruptly into one of those narrow alleys which, at intervals along its whole length, take off from the broad stream of the Khiaban. In a trice they were alone in a still, deserted backwater.

The alley into which they had turned was narrow, tortuous, ill-paved. It was flanked on either side by blank walls, built with no regard for alignment

and perilously leaning. They passed from time to time low, unpainted doorways, so old, so ramshackle, that the young man doubted if they had ever been opened, or if they led anywhere at all.

To his astonishment, the elder man stopped before one of these ancient portals and rattled an iron ring which hung from it. The young man heard, in a room above the door, the shuffle of footsteps and then a question in the Persian tongue. His companion answered by a single word.

The door was opened and the elder man, bidding the other look out for his head, plunged forward and disappeared as into a grave. The young man hesitated a moment and looked doubtfully about him; then, stooping to avoid the lintel, followed. Before he had time to take stock of his whereabouts, the door swung to; he was in utter darkness.

The young man was startled. He turned and fumbled for the lock. Hoping vaguely that he might be heard outside, he shouted and beat on the door with his fists. Then he turned again and called loudly to his companion. There was no response.

He was frightened. He stumbled forward blindly, feeling with his hands. On either side he touched rough, unplastered walls. He could reach the beams above his head. He realised that he was in a low, narrow passage.

He was, in fact, in one of those subterranean passages, common enough in Persia, which are often the only means of access to a house situated in the middle of a block. These remote, inaccessible dwellings are looked upon with favour by the Persians; for they like to feel that in the inevitable

hour of confusion, a barrier lies between them and the dangerous street.

The young man's eyes grew accustomed gradually to the darkness. As he stumbled on, he began to see points of light ahead. They looked like cracks in a closed door. Was he nearing the end of the passage?

Suddenly, and as it seemed to him far away, a door was thrown open and the passage was flooded with light. He saw, grimy, mud-brick walls on either side of him; rough-hewn, cobwebbed beams above and a dusty earth floor underfoot. Then he stepped on, mounted upwards through an open door, and stood again in the light of the fading afternoon.

He had issued into an ugly courtyard, paved with brick and bounded on three sides by high, forbidding walls. In the centre of the courtyard lay a rectangular tank of murky water. A two-storied house looked down upon the courtyard from the fourth side, dismally, inhospitably. The house was large, ramshackle, dilapidated. A verandah ran the length of it, garnished with a warped and battered wooden rail which had been painted, years ago, a cold, incisive blue. The roof of the verandah was supported by a row of sorry columns, from which chunks of plaster had fallen, laying bare in patches the rough, brown poplar poles beneath.

His companion was mounting the crumbling steps which led to the verandah. The young man followed, unwillingly. He was no longer frightened, but he was disconcerted, annoyed. Who was this yellow-skinned outcast, who no doubt called himself

an Englishman? Why had he brought him, almost without a word, into this inexplicable place? He wished to God that he had never come. He wished that he had never set foot in the country. He would go back, blamed if he wouldn't. He thought of London on a Saturday night.

His host led the way to the door at the farthest end of the verandah.

"Here's your room," he said. "You'll find a bath in there." He pointed to a curtain hung across a doorway in the corner; then disappeared.

The room in which the young man found himself lacked even the rudiments of comfort. In the corner stood a camp-bed, on the very point of wrack. A washstand of unpainted wood, grimy and fly-specked, leaned perilously against the wall. On it stood an enamelled wash-basin, battered, leprous. That was all. Even the dusty earth-floor lacked the invariable distinction of a carpet.

As he was taking stock, uneasily, of his new quarters, the door opened and the turbaned youth entered with his kit. The succession of his surprises had put this out of the young man's mind. Now the sight of the smiling, lusty boy carrying his bags of solid English leather reassured him. To the boy, at least, there seemed to be nothing unusual in this way of life. There might be, after all, no reason for mistrust. Persia was, to be sure, a different place from Peckham Rye.

He regarded with tolerance, with condescension, the young Persian. He wished that he could make him understand how much behind the times he was. He wished that he could tell him that in

civilised countries a man does not enter his house through an underground passage; that people there didn't travel in crazy carriages held together by old nails and bits of string. There were such things as trains—though perhaps he hadn't heard of them. Aw—the Scotch Express!

They were all alike, these backward races: sunk over head and ears in a slough of dirt, ignorance and superstition; yet so damnably self-satisfied. They even looked down on us—on the British! He reckoned, taking 'em all round, that the British were the finest race on earth. They had their faults, of course. But taking them all round—you know what I mean—they were the finest. Yet these swine—oh, it was laughable!

The eyes of the young man in the blue cotton tunic smiled. He stood and waited respectfully by the door. He was thinking:

"How much is he going to give? Whatever he gives it will not be enough. Let these sons of burning fathers pay!"

The young man in the tweed suit regarded the young Persian inquiringly.

"Of course, I forgot; the fellow wants his money. That's all they think about. How many of these things ought one to give, I wonder? Anyhow, I'll let him understand that a Britisher isn't a skinflint. Here you are, sonny. Now get out! Skedaddle! Savvy?"

He pushed the youth out of the door and banged it after him.

When the young man, with aid of brush, soap and cold water, had rid his person of the whelming dust

of Persian travel, he issued from the room. He walked the length of the verandah, looking in at the uncurtained windows, one after the other, for his host. The rooms, one after the other, were bare and empty. In the last room, at the opposite end of the verandah from his own, he found him reclining in a low, cane-bottomed chair. He sat with one leg thrown carelessly over the chair's long arm. An oil-lamp on a stand of sky-blue glass stood in a niche in the wall behind him and cast a yellow light into the bare, uncarpeted room. Before him was a rough deal table, on which stood a decanter and glasses. The elder man pointed to them.

"It's arakh," he said. "Sorry I haven't any whisky. Still, arakh's not bad—when you're used to it."

Following his companion's directions, the young man poured himself a drink of the colourless liquid. After his harassing day he found it cool and refreshing. There was a pause. Then the other said:

"You would hardly call this a delightful residential quarter, eh? You'll find something of the kind on the other side of the town, near the consulates and the *meidan*. Personally, I prefer this. It's quieter, for one thing. No damned interference. Cheaper, too," he added reflectively. "It's pot-luck, mind," he continued, after a pause. "You'll have to take me as you find me. No frills. I can't afford 'em."

The young man murmured something about his host's courtesy. The other raised a thin, deprecating hand:

"Oh, that's all right. Sorry I can't make you a little more comfortable. However, it can't be helped. The fact is, we went broke. Before that, things were all right—quite all right. Now——" He shrugged his shoulders. Then he added: "Still, I reckon it does a man good to find out how some of his own people live on the other side of the world. Makes a man understand and avoid mistakes and keep his mouth shut."

There was a pause. The elder man helped himself to another drink from the decanter. The young man drained his glass and set it down with a ring of cordiality on the table. His heart was warming now towards this pallid, outcast countryman. The man was down on his luck, that was clear. But what was he doing in an outlandish hole like this?

The elder man lay in his chair, staring at the bare poles of the ceiling. He was considering whether, after all, it is not best to let sleeping dogs lie; whether the sum of misery is not enough. . . .

Suddenly, with an abruptness and a passion which startled the young man, he broke the silence:

"By thunder, you shall hear how it all happened. You're young—maybe it'll do you good. Maybe. I'm not so sure." He smiled, enigmatically, to himself. "A man in England let us down. Carpets had been our line. We used to ship 'em to a firm in London. It was my old governor who built up the business. He had made money. Not a great deal, you understand, but enough for him to send me home to school. While I was over there, his agent was my guardian—looked after me, so to speak.

I used to spend my holidays at his place in the country." He paused, and then added with another burst of passion : " Lord, how I hated it ! " He took a gulp from his glass and added slowly : " He was a damned, cool, cruel swine ; oily, smooth as silk. Used to torment his wife. Do you know, I saw him strike his son one day, so that the little beggar fell over and cut his cheek against the marble table in the hall ? "

Up to that point, the young man had listened with polite attention to his host's narrative ; but now he started, put up his hand and touched involuntarily a faint scar on his right cheek.

The other went on in a tone of serious protest :

" There's a lot of misery in the lives of kids sent home from out-of-the-way places. Too bad. Wants looking into."

He took another gulp from his glass.

" Things were going pretty well with the governor when I got back. We had the finest house in Meshed ; servants and half a dozen horses in the stable. The business was prospering. Our carpets were well known at home. The old man used to say, ' Only a few more years, my boy, and we can quit this God-forsaken country. I'll buy a place within easy reach of town, so that we can run in now and again to see Hare or Lily Langtry.' He would point to an advertisement in an old copy of *Country Life*. ' What do you think of this ? ' he would say. ' Looks pretty good, eh ? There are hundreds more like it, my boy, in the old country. We'll take our time and pick up something good ; something that you can keep up when I'm gone.' "

He poured himself a drink from the decanter and continued. The young man followed breathlessly every word.

" About two years after I came back, things began to get slack at the other end. Sales began to fall off. Remittances slowed down. Accounts were in arrears. The old man thought nothing of it. How should he, after so many years? We went on shipping. At last things got to such a pitch he didn't like it. We telegraphed for money. The fellow wired back that there was no market and that very little had been sold. We couldn't understand it. We were anxious. I suggested that I ought to go home to look into things. He agreed at last. I went.

" I went, but it was too late. When I arrived, I found that the fellow had bolted to South America. He had sold the carpets months ago and cleared off with twenty thousand pounds!

" There was a hue-and-cry, of course. Scotland Yard, lawyers and what-not. I soon saw there was nothing in all that. I chucked it and came back.

" The bazaar had got wind, of course, of what had happened. We owed money to native bankers. But they trusted the old man. He asked for time; and then he set to work to sell up everything. Everything went: the house at Bagh-i-Fin, where I was born, with its poplar avenues, its rose-garden, its brimming tanks; the horses and carriages; the furniture; the carpets; the old man's rugs and Persian curios. That was the bitterest pill of all. He bore up pretty well until it came to that; it well-nigh finished him to part with them. Then

we moved over here. In six months he was dead. Since then, for fifteen years, I've lived here by myself."

He passed his hand across his forehead and glanced uneasily at the open door. Then he took a long breath, seeming to gather himself together for one more effort, and went on :

" Well, what do you think of that, young Jardine ? You're charmed, I dare swear, with this delightful *ménage*. It's a joy to you, I'll be bound, to know that this profusion of good cheer is due to the benevolence of that scoundrel, your father."

For a moment Jardine was too dazed for speech. Then slowly it broke upon him that his opportunity had come. He had something to say, and this was the moment and the place. There was a gesture to make, and he, Jardine, was to make it. That it was really not his gesture did not occur to him. The stage was set. He spoke, almost patronisingly, in snatches :

" Look here, what do you think I'm doing in your damned country, eh ? Selling beads to savages ? Not much. You'll be surprised, I reckon, when you hear. Listen ! That fellow—my father—left us fifteen years ago—mother and me. We hadn't a penny, mind, to bless ourselves with. Mother turned dressmaker. I tell you, she's a wonderful woman. I delivered the parcels. To-day we've got a nice little millinery business—Madame Jardine, 12 Levaine Road, Peckham. For fifteen years we never heard of him—not a word. For all we cared he might have been dead and damned. Then, a couple of months ago, she got a letter from a firm of

solicitors in the city. After fifteen years, mind. The fellow had died in Valparaiso. Left a few thousand to his pore wife in England. Deathbed repentence, as you might say. D'you think she'd touch it? Not she. 'It's not mine to take,' she says. 'You go to Persia,' she says, 'and find a man called Venable, because it's his.'"

Venable seemed not to hear. His face was livid and his eyes tired and dull. He passed his hand again across his forehead and glanced again at the open door uneasily. Then he rose, crossed the room, put his head outside and called in the vernacular to someone who was waiting, apparently, without:

"Come in, you fool! What are you waiting for? Don't you know it's time?"

There was a shuffling of feet on the verandah. A voice mumbled something about a stranger. Then a Persian servant entered—an old man, yellow, bent, clad in a tattered coat of ancient livery. In one hand he held a pipe with a long stem and a bowl of white china; in the other a pair of tongs, in which a piece of charcoal glowed. The servant placed the tongs upon the earthen floor, drew a small box from his girdle, opened it and took from it a ball the size of a pea. This he pressed with trembling fingers above a small hole on the side of the pipe, which he handed to Venable. Venable seized it impatiently, and as the old man applied the piece of charcoal to the bowl, he took three or four deep whiffs, one after the other. Then he lay back in his chair with eyes closed and a contented smile on his thin, pallid face. A fusty, pungent odour filled the room.

In a few moments, Venable opened his eyes.

They were no longer dull, but shone with deep brilliance. He spoke, slowly and deliberately; he seemed to Jardine to be stronger, surer of himself, serener.

"It's too late, Jardine, old man. You go back. Just send me enough—from time to time—to keep me going—in this."

THE CONVERT

"TESTED by the acid test of results," said Haseltine, "we are a failure—after forty years of effort the Mussulman, still, is unconvinced."

It was night. We were sitting on the flat mud roof of the Mission House in Meshed. Through the half-light of the rising moon I watched Haseltine settle himself deeper in his folding camp-chair, cross his hands behind his head, as was his wont, and puff silently at his pipe. Across the flat roofs of the sleeping town, he seemed to be watching, moodily, the dome and minarets of the Shrine, stencilled against the golden Persian moon.

Said Haseltine at length: "Every summer, when our school is closed, I make up a little caravan—two saddle-horses and a couple of pack-mules—and tour the district, visiting our sub-stations and preaching in the villages. We call it 'itinerating' in our missionary jargon. Just two years ago, I set out from Meshed on such a journey. I planned to make my first stop in a village called Husseinabad, about sixteen miles to the southward on the Turbat road.

"I carried letters to a certain Mollah Hussein who lived there, and I looked forward to passing the first night of my journey with him. He was described to me as a person of talent and learning. The village, it appeared, was his property, and he lived there among his tenants. That in itself, you know, is

rare. As a rule these fellows live lives of sloth and stupid ostentation in the towns.

" You can understand that I was curious to meet this man. I had looked to find a typical mollah—elderly, bearded, portly ; keeping careful watch over his dignity, his *sha'n* ; but to my surprise, a youth of twenty-five, with the mien of an ascetic, rose to greet me when I stooped to pass through the low door into his reception-room. Why are all their doors so low, I wonder ? Is it because wood is so dear ? I wish I had a pound for every time that I have knocked my head against a lintel ! . . .

" You know how these rooms are : long and narrow ; with a row of windows made up of little panes of plain and coloured glass along the side which looks towards the courtyard ; with the other walls built up of three rows of niches, one above the other, full of Belgian lamps of blue and red glass, little inlaid boxes, turquoise-blue bowls and graceful candlesticks. . . .

" He rose, the young man, from a cumulation of mattresses and bolsters which lay in the middle of the floor. He was very tall and very thin. His long grey Persian coat fell from his narrow shoulders almost to the floor, accentuating his height and the frailness of his build. His face was pale, almost colourless ; his teeth white and regular. The hollowness of his cheeks gave mournful prominence to his jawbones and high cheekbones. His eyes were large, dark and cavernous ; his fingers long and thin. Round his head he wore a snow-white turban of cotton gauze. A melancholy, poetic figure.

" I presented my letter and he begged me to be

seated. I suggested that I might be giving him a great deal of trouble, and I entreated his forgiveness; but he assured me, in their urbane way, that I had, on the contrary, bestowed on him a great, great kindness, and that the house was mine.

"He entertained me with fine Persian hospitality. Can one say more? Tell me, is there any hospitality so ample, so informed, so unobtrusive, as the hospitality, Feranghi or native, of this country?

"After sherbet and the inevitable tea, the servants spread those beautifully-printed cloths of theirs on the carpeted floor. Then they brought in a mountain of snow-white pilau, with innumerable bowls of stews and broths. Then huge folds of flat bread, with gobbets of roast meat between. And all the while, they kept dotting the table with *épergnes* of cakes and candy. And when we had done with these, came immense segments of water-melon and musk-melon, luscious grapes and peaches —peaches of Khorasan! For drink we had fermented milk, iced, which we drank with wooden ladles from a common bowl. My host ate little, but with look and quiet gesture, he instructed the servants to ply me with the good things.

"When the meal was over, we repaired to the adjoining room. It was, I judged, his study. The niches in the walls were full of printed and manuscript books, neatly bound in black sheepskin. We sat on a mattress in the middle of the floor—he easily, with his back unsupported; I leaning against a big round bolster.

"As is the rule between persons of the cloth, we talked shop. I learned that he was *Hafiz*, one who

could repeat the whole of the Koran by heart. He told me that this attainment had cost him three years of unremitting labour. I found that he had studied the Commentaries and that he was versed in the Koranic Law. Their mollahs are, you know, rather more than priests; they are notaries public, judges, and professors of the law, much as the monks were with us in the Middle Ages.

"He was curious, he said, to learn something about Christianity. 'Is it true, Kashish Sah'b, that you Christians have three Gods: the Father, Jesus, and Mary the Virgin?'"

Haseltine paused in his narrative to knock the ashes out of his pipe. The moon had climbed, and hung over the Shrine, turning its golden dome into an inverted bowl of burnished silver.

"I have had a lot to do," continued Haseltine, "during the last twenty-five years, with people whom we call, in our terminology, Inquirers. It is part of our business: we have classes for them. The majority are ignorant, and many, alas, have axes to grind! Rarely do we happen upon one who can think intelligently.

"But he was not of that kind. He was, in the Moslem sense, an educated man: that is to say, his mind was saturated with the Koran and with that mass of subtle dialectic which the Arabs have built round it. He was enthusiastic over their acuteness and penetration. But, somehow, I had a feeling that he was not satisfied.

"That night I told him, as simply as I could, the story of the Life, from birth to crucifixion. Isn't

this, after all, the whole of Christianity? There is no subtle dialectic here: 'Love your enemies,' 'blessed are the pure in spirit,' 'I was sick and ye visited Me.' To a man of his gentle, poetic temperament, born and bred in the narrow, vindictive atmosphere of the Koranic Law, here was something new, arresting. He was profoundly interested, profoundly moved.

"Before we retired for the night, he reminded me that the next day was Friday. He was to hold a service, he said, in the mosque next door. He invited me to attend. That took me by surprise, because they never permit unbelievers to set foot inside their mosques.

"'We worship the same God,' he said simply.

"At about six o'clock the next morning, we entered the little mosque through a side-door. It was nothing but a large room, the mosque, perfectly bare of furniture. The roof consisted of four flat domes resting on low pointed arches of bare brick. On the two sides which faced the street, the spaces between the arches were filled, espalier, with a wooden trellis. To this, in lieu of glazing, sheets of oiled paper had been stuck. Some of these had come away and were fluttering in the wind.

"On the rush mats which covered the floor, a few villagers were sitting, with their feet tucked under them in the Persian manner. Here and there, one stood apart and performed the ordered motions of prayer. They paid no special heed to us. Others continued to come in, by twos and threes, until there were some forty men present.

"At the western end of the mosque, which looks

towards Kerbela and Mecca, there was a small platform made of plaster. Mollah Hussein invited me to ascend the low step which led to it, and then he followed me. There was just room enough for both of us to sit, each on a little rug. I could see that the eyes of the villagers were upon me, but in their faces there was no resentment—only a dull, clouded curiosity.

" He rose, and facing towards Mecca, he began to repeat sonorously the prayers proper to the hour; and those who had not already finished their prayers followed his lead, kneeling, prostrating themselves, with humility and dignity.

" He recited in a clear, musical voice the wonderful first Sura—that cunningly devised rhapsody of l's, m's, n's and open vowels which, so they say, will, if chanted worthily, of itself convert unbelievers:

" ' Bismillahi rahmani raheem
El-hamdu lillahi rabi lalameen.'

Then he read another Sura from the Koran, translating, as he went along, the sonorous Arabic into hardly less sonorous Persian.

" Then he turned to me—just like that—and asked me if I would like to preach to them. You can believe, it took my breath away! I had been twenty-five years in Persia, and had never so much as seen the inside of a mosque before, and here was a mollah inviting me to preach to his congregation! I can't remember what I answered, but the next thing I knew was that I was on my feet, reading to them from my Persian Testament the parable of the Prodigal Son.

"Well, you know how that is in the Authorized Version. Is there anything like it, I wonder, in all literature? To me, it is so moving that I can scarcely trust myself to read it aloud. The Persian Bible is not great literature like ours, but it happens that in this parable the translator has caught something of the wizardry. And they understood it! They understood it better than we ever can understand it—because their lives are like that. I might have been telling them about somebody they knew, in the next village.

"Then I preached to them a little sermon on Repentance.

"That night I sat up with Mollah Hussein again into the small hours. And when I set off the next morning, he told me that he would think over what I had said, and would come to see me when I returned to Meshed."

Once more, Haseltine paused in his narration. He lay back in his chair, gazing across the flat roofs at that mass of domes and minarets which form the buildings of the Shrine, now bathed in an unearthly pallor of moonlight. At last he went on, in a voice depressed, forlorn:

"In a month, I was back from my tour. He rode in from his village one day to see me. He had been turning things over in his mind, and he was full of questions. After that he used to ride in regularly, first once, then twice a week. We spent many afternoons and evenings together, reading, analysing, debating. He was the keenest listener and the closest questioner that I have ever known. At last,

one day, after months of communion and study, he spoke to me of his desire to become a Christian.

" I wonder if you quite realise what it means to us to achieve that? That is, after all, what we are here for, you understand. The road is long and hard, and the successes few; and most of them fill us with doubts as to their fitness and honesty. But here was a mollah, a man of brains and education, brought up in the shadow, as it were, of the Koran, who stood to lose friends and possessions if he accepted Christ—yet he had accepted! The regeneration of Persia was no myth: at last, the labour of forty years in this wilderness was beginning to bear fruit!

" I asked him whether he had made any plans for his future. He said, no. Would it be possible, I asked, for him to continue to live in his village? Would his *rayats* recognise his authority? Could he reckon on the Governor's support? He shook his head. I asked him then how he would like to enter the Mission Hospital and study medicine.

" He looked at me for a moment as if he did not altogether understand. Then he thanked me and said that he would think it over.

" The next night, as I was putting out my study lamp, the gatekeeper knocked at my door and told me that Mollah Hussein was at the gate and desired to speak to me. The lateness of the hour made me anxious; a Persian never calls after sundown, except in Ramazan.

" ' They have found it out,' he said.

" ' Who? ' I asked.

" ' The People of the Shrine,' he said. ' I have

not told you—what was the use?—that my father is one of the Keepers of the Shrine; and my brother also. Had I wished, I too could have become one of them; but I preferred to live in my village. Last night my brother came to my house. He is a mild man, my brother. But last night he was like a man crazed with *bhang*.

" ' " What is it with you, my brother?" I said to him.

" ' " Brother," he cried, " is it possible that you are bringing disgrace and dishonour on all our house? Oh, my brother, tell me that it is not so!"

" ' To which I answered: " Twelve hundred years ago, we Persians worshipped the sun and fire. And the armies of the Prophet invaded our country, and forced our people to worship God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Did then our ancestors who abandoned the lesser light bring dishonour on their house?"

" ' He cried, " They brought honour."

" ' " How then should I, who have found a light more wonderful than the Light which the Prophet brought, bring dishonour to our family?"

" ' Then his eyes burned like coals, and froth gathered round his lips. " You are no longer my brother," he cried. I thought that he would strike me. " Cursed be all unbelievers," he cried again, " and thrice cursed are those who have known the Faith and cast it out. They shall burn in hell-fire," and he ran from the house.

" ' They will kill me,' said Mollah Hussein simply. ' They will surely kill me—the People of the Shrine. Lest it should happen to-night, I thought I would

let you know.' And he turned to go back to his own house.

" I would not let him go. I saw that they would kill him as swiftly and with as little pity as they would kill a snake. I had brought him into this peril, and I must save him. Also," said Haseltine, simply, " I loved the man. . . ."

Haseltine pointed to the great golden dome glistening in the moonlight. He said : " It is the holiest place in all Persia—the shrine of Reza, the eighth Imam. Every year a hundred thousand pilgrims visit it. The People of the Shrine are the most powerful religious body in the country. And I never knew that Hussein was in any way connected with it ! He had never mentioned it, you see. Perhaps—had I known—I might have left him in his village. I know the People of the Shrine too well. The age of martyrs is over—it was not for me to revive it.

" But he knew from the beginning whither this road was leading. Did I say that the age of martyrs is over ? "

Haseltine had sunk down in his chair. His voice was weary, and he brought out his words with effort.

" I had the greatest difficulty to make him set out that night for Tehran. It was the only thing to do. He said that it was useless—the hand of the Shrine reached to Tehran. Not until I urged him to go straight on to Kermanshah, a thousand miles away, would he consent. Kermanshah, perhaps, was far enough away—it was worth trying.

"I gave him a horse and filled a saddle-bag with necessaries for the journey. Through dark, narrow streets to the city gate I walked beside his horse, and bade him God-speed at midnight.

"Three days later, a letter, addressed to me in Persian, was handed to my gate-keeper. It consisted of four words:

"'The Apostate is dead.'

"Next day it was rumoured in the bazaar that Turkomans had robbed and murdered a traveller, one stage this side of Nishapur."

THE KING'S BIRTHDAY

I

"THE truth is," said Rouevsky, after his fifth vodka, "the truth undoubtedly is that I am not a banker. We Russians are not bankers. No. We are drunkards, musicians, ploughmen, linguists, ballet-dancers, monks, gluttons, pessimists. But we are not bankers. And it is my fate to be a Russian, and, what is more, I am proud of it.

"Now, the British, on the other hand," continued Rouevsky, "are bankers. They are bankers, just as they are shop-keepers, sailors, commercial travellers, manufacturers; yes, and poets. Though how the devil they come to be poets is to me a mystery. But above all they are bankers. Then, in God's name, Vassileff, let us leave banking to them and apply our intelligences to the ballet, which is so much more amusing." And he proceeded, with grace, to perform a *pas seul* on the floor of the manager's office.

"True, Feodor Gavrilitch," answered Vassileff, tugging at the few grey hairs on the end of his chin, "but in the meantime we have to live. And if we don't show results, Petersburg will show us the door. The fact is, a lot of banking business is done in this cursed Meshed bazaar, but MacPherson gets it all. These British, truly, are good bankers, and among all the British tribes the best bankers are the Scotch.

And behold," cried Vassileff, throwing up his hands, " the good God has sent this MacPherson, a Scotchman, to operate against us ! "

" Ah, MacPherson, miserable Scotchman ! " cried Rouevsky. " You run up and down the keyboard of this Persian exchange like Godovsky playing the ' Rossignol ' of Liszt. Who shall deliver us out of your hands ? "

Vassileff stroked reflectively the grey hairs on the end of his chin.

" There is a thing that one could do——"

" For the love of God, what ? " cried Rouevsky.

Vassileff considered critically the office ceiling of straw matting laid upon untrimmed poplar poles. Then he said :

" You know, of course, that the iniquitous charter which the British wrested from the Persian Government thirty years ago gives to their bank the sole right to issue notes in this benighted country ? "

" You flatter me, Vassileff," said Rouevsky. " I do happen to know it, but I assure you that it is the only fact connected with Persian banking which I have gleaned, since, by the grace of God and the blessed patronage of my Uncle Peter, I was appointed to the exalted position of manager of the Meshed branch of the Russo-Persian Bank."

" Good," said Vassileff. " Listen, then, Feodor Gavrilitch, while I tell you how we can singe the beard of this Scotchman."

" Alas," said Rouevsky, " he has no beard ! I visit him. We are on the best of terms. He is clean-shaven."

" I spoke figuratively," said Vassileff.

"Pray go on," said Rouevsky. "I burn to hear how I am to singe the beard of this beardless Scotchman."

"These notes of the English Bank," answered Vassileff, "we will accumulate them in our treasury. Slowly, secretly, without fuss. It will take time, of course, to collect a sufficient number—three months, perhaps, or longer. When we are ready, we will have them presented, all on the same day, by some Persian. Our Persian will demand coin in exchange. MacPherson is always short of coin, because Transcaspia absorbs it as fast as it arrives from Tehran. The amount of silver which those Sarts absorb is prodigious! MacPherson will not have enough coin to redeem such an amount of notes. It takes a month for a caravan of silver to reach Meshed from the capital. He will have to close his doors!"

"I am a child in these matters," said Rouevsky, "but would the Persians mind a little *contretemps* like that? They, who never meet a bill on its due date. Why should they be upset if the English bank cannot redeem its notes for a week or two? MacPherson will invite them into his office; he will give them many little cups of tea, with plenty of sugar; and he will tell them that ten million krans are on the way from Tehran. Then all will be well."

"If I may say so," said Vassileff, "that is where you are wrong, Feodor Gavrilitch. It is quite true that the Persians rarely meet their bills on the due date. That is their custom; they understand it; they expect it of each other, and they think nothing of it. But to foreigners their attitude is different. They are suspicious of us. They fear that we have

come into their country to take away their money. This suspicion has been lulled by years of scrupulous fulfilment of our obligations. But if we once fail! Why, do you know what difficulties the English Bank encountered before it could get these notes into circulation at all? For years nobody would take them. Even now they are unknown in the villages and hardly current in the towns. Believe me, if the bank once fails to redeem them on demand, every bazaar in Persia will know it, and here in Meshed the bank's goose is cooked."

"Vassileff!" cried Rouevsky. "One thing is clear to me: some day you will be President of the Russo-Persian Bank. As for this Scotchman, we will singe his beard, if we can find it. What a game! What an outrageous game! Vassileff, I drink to the future president of the Russo-Persian Bank! You shall promote me to the office of head-doorkeeper in Petersburg. I rather fancy myself in a red uniform with brass buttons. Drink, Vassileff, to the future President and his head-doorkeeper, in red uniform and brass buttons! And now to bed, to sleep off the effects of this cursed Persian vodka. To-morrow, when my head is clearer, we will talk over this thing again. Good night!"

II

To reach, from the covered bazaar, the offices of the National Bank of Persia, you pass, under a pointed arch, into a gloomy passage. Here stands on guard and presents arms a ragged, unshaven, good-humoured figure in an ancient uniform,

clutching an ancient musket. The passage slopes downwards for a matter of fifteen paces and issues suddenly into the dazzling brightness of a garden, aflame in spring with marigolds; a garden of narrow, straight paths, paved with flags from the Mountain of Stones, which you can see from any roof in Meshed, rising, a grey sugar-loaf, out of the dusty plain. In the middle of the garden lies a brimming pool of greenish water, where lazy goldfish bask in the clean, Persian sun.

The offices of the bank are at the end of the garden. A flight of steps, built of thin bricks set edgewise, leads from the garden level to an open porch adorned with four columns of white plaster. On any morning of the week you will find the porch thronged with keen-eyed, gaberdined, gesticulating figures. They are the brokers of exchange. For here, in this out-of-the-way corner of Asia (as indeed in every corner of the world), the apostles of exchange are Jews.

Through the doorway is a lobby, where, conscious of their power and position in the financial world of the bazaar, loiter the liveried servants of the bank. From the lobby an open doorway leads into the main office. There, behind a cage of grimy brass rods, stands the cashier, in sober habit and black pill-box cap. For him, life is made up of counting an endless stream of silver pieces and shovelling them into an endless chain of cotton bags. Past the cage of the dusky cashier are the long tables where sit the ten Armenian mirzas of the bank. Here, day in, day out, they garnish, with strange, un-English digits, those huge, thick-leaved, leather-bound registers from London. In a land of flimsy

paper and evanescent bindings these ponderous, gilt-lettered tomes impart an air of permanence, of inevitableness, to the operations of the bank.

At the far end of this room there is a yellow door. Yellow, but streaked with lines of a dark, furry brown, to indicate, perhaps, the graining of some far, still undiscovered wood. It opens into the office of the chief accountant.

Here, during office hours, the chief accountant sits, a kind of Cerberus, guarding against those aggressive clients of the bank who may have run the gauntlet of sentry, servants, cashier and Armenian mirzas, a second yellow door. This leads into the Holy of Holies, the office of the manager.

In the outer of the two rooms sat the manager, chubby-faced, blue-eyed, sandy-haired MacPherson, and puffed morosely at his pipe. The accountant, a dark, wiry little man, in khaki breeches, was seated at his desk. He was writing, over and over again, in his even, legible hand, below the illegible signature of his chief, on the firsts and seconds of exchange in the bill-book, " Reginald Lee."

Business had been good that day. The sales of bills on London had been heavy. The fingers of the chief accountant were getting cramped with writing his own name, time after time. He stopped therefore, placed his pen behind his ear and turned to MacPherson.

" For the life of me, I cannot see what there is to worry about," said he.

" No ? " said MacPherson.

" Haven't we been trying for years to increase the note-circulation ? "

"Aye," said MacPherson, "we have that."

"Well, these duffers have discovered at last that it's simpler to run through a bundle of notes than to sit on their haunches all day counting out two-kran pieces. It has taken a devilish time, but they've discovered it at last."

MacPherson appeared not to hear.

"Why worry?" said Lee impatiently. "What if we are a wee bit short of krans? The caravan will be here in a fortnight. Then we shall have enough silver to buy up the whole bazaar."

MacPherson studied the pattern of the dusty, footworn carpet.

"They're not coming back," said he absently.

"The notes, you mean?" said Lee. "Why should they? The bazaar is using them. They're circulating. The days when we paid 'em out in the morning and got 'em all back in the afternoon are past. We've established the circulation at last. It's come with a rush, that's all."

"It has that," said MacPherson. He puffed reflectively at his pipe, then removed it from his teeth, and added slowly: "You can't establish anything in this ancient and benighted land in six weeks, and don't you forget it, Reggie."

Lee bit his pen. "What do you make of it, then?" said he.

"Dunno," said MacPherson. "We'll soon find out, mebbe."

MacPherson rose and walked heavily into the inner office. He sat down at his desk and passed a large red hand through his shock of sandy hair. He stared at the fair, clean blotting-pad before him.

Then, taking a sheet of paper from the rack, he wrote upon it with a reed pen, meticulously, in Persian.

III

There may be found in the bazaar of any town in Persia a house or caravanserai which a foreigner may use without much risk or inconvenience as an office. But if he attempt, as some have done, to live over his office, looking to enjoy there reasonable health and the simple amenities of life in Persia, he is embarking on a hazardous, perhaps a fatal, enterprise. For your Persian, when he builds, is not concerned with such foibles as fresh air, drainage, water-supply or a gravel soil. He seeks, first and last, a boon which is for us so ancient, so unchallenged, that we have almost forgotten its significance. I mean security. This, he is persuaded, is hidden in the cramped heart of the town. If the water which supplies his needs has meandered in an open channel through the courtyards of a hundred dwellings, gathering up in its course a thousand abominations, what harm? The cloudy stream will be turned into a cistern underneath his house, where, God willing, it will settle through the night. In the morning will it not be good for drinking? It will be good.

It was for this that MacPherson, who was an old hand, chose for his office the house of Abbas Khan, in the heart of the bazaar; but built without the Wall, within easy riding distance of the town, two dwellings; one for himself—a spreading, wide-eaved, comfortable house; and one, more modest, for his accountant.

The liveried butler opened noiselessly the door of the room known as the " Book," because His Honour the Manager uses it when he brings home his ledgers —which is not very often. MacPherson was seated at his desk. He was considering attentively a large-scale map of Eastern Persia. A telegram lay open upon the desk beside it. The servant approached and waited for his master to address him, but MacPherson was too absorbed to take notice of his presence. The servant discreetly coughed. MacPherson looked up and said in Persian :

" What is it ? "

" A mirza desires to speak with the Sah'b."

" Show him in," said MacPherson.

He folded up the map and stuffed the telegram into his pocket.

A slim, handsome, dark-skinned gentleman, wearing a black coat, notched at the neck, and a small black pill-box hat, was ushered into the room and took his stand by the inevitable Morris chair.

" Salaam, Isaak Khan," said MacPherson, with less cordiality than even he was accustomed to express.

The Persian gravely answered the salutation and waited for the Sah'b to pursue the conversation.

" The health of Isaak Khan is good, by the grace of God ? " inquired MacPherson.

" Thanks be to God and to the benevolence of the Exalted Presence," answered the Persian, watching with downcast eyes MacPherson's movements and marking every inflection of his voice.

" Did my paper arrive ? " inquired MacPherson.

"The paper of the Exalted Presence arrived," answered the Persian.

"You have an information?"

"There is an information."

"Good," said MacPherson. "Sit down." He pointed to the chair.

The Persian sat primly on the edge of it, resting his hands on his knees.

MacPherson drew from his pocket a ring with keys on it, selected with deliberation a small key from the bunch, and unlocked a drawer of his desk. He withdrew carelessly a bundle of notes which he placed upon the table. The Persian, hardly raising his eyes from the floor, followed every movement.

"Well?" said MacPherson, looking up.

"There are notes in the bank's treasury for four hundred thousand tomans," said the Persian.

MacPherson nodded.

"They will be presented by a certain merchant of the bazaar, who will demand silver krans in exchange."

MacPherson yawned.

"And when will this tiresome operation take place?" he inquired wearily.

"As I understand, on the seventh day after the New Year," answered the Persian. "By that time, it is calculated that there will be another *crore* of notes in the Treasury."

MacPherson took a pipe from his pocket, filled it with care, struck a match and applied it to the bowl. When it was drawing to his satisfaction, he remarked:

"My friend the Reis of the Russian Bank is

playing a game which I trust affords him some entertainment. I presume that he is unaware that I have more silver in my vaults than I know what to do with. Also that a caravan with another five million krans is on the way from Tehran."

"As to the silver in the vaults," answered the Persian calmly, "for a good reason, the Reis of the Russian Bank is unaware of its existence. As to the caravan, he is informed of the date of its departure and when it is expected in Meshed. If, however, the notes should be presented before the caravan arrives?"

MacPherson shrugged his shoulders.

"The Reis will no doubt act as he thinks best. As for you, Isaak Khan, you have deserved well."

He took up the bundle of notes and handed it easily to the Persian. Isaak Khan, without embarrassment, slipped the notes into the inside pocket of his coat and buttoned it to the throat. MacPherson rose to put an end to the interview. Isaak Khan, too, rose, bowed with serious politeness, and withdrew.

When the door closed behind the Persian, MacPherson sat with his head in his hands and considered the position.

That confidence in the bank which he had built up, patiently, laboriously, in this, the most distrustful and fanatical community in all Persia, would be swept away. . . .

What a fool Rouevsky was! The Russians could never see beyond their noses. They were setting fire to their own house just to smoke him out. However, that was their business, not his. . . .

It wasn't a matter of his branch only. The news would spread like wildfire over Persia. Every bazaar in the country would know that in Meshed the bank had failed to redeem its notes. There might be runs on several branches. There might be runs on all! That kind of flood gathers force as it goes on. . . .

Resht was probably short of silver; Tabriz certainly was short. The bank would be in danger! . . .

MacPherson rose, went out into the hall, put on his hat and walked into the darkness.

IV

He crossed the verandah which surrounded his house, descended the broad stone steps and walked along the avenue of poplars to a small gate at the end. He pushed back the rough wooden bolt and passed into the accountant's garden on the other side. Lee had finished his dinner and was enjoying, before a blazing fire of apricot logs, a pile of ancient *Tatlers* and a post-prandial pipe. He rose when his table-boy announced in Persian, in a hushed voice,

"His Honour the Manager."

Lee drew up towards the fire a Morris chair like that in which he had been sitting, blood-brother to the one in his office and to that in the room which MacPherson had just left.

The visit of his manager at this time intrigued him. The two men, by silent, mutual understanding, kept apart after office hours. The long day was enough.

Lee pushed forward a silver box, containing dark

Indian cheroots. It was by Mappin's of London. He had won it the year before in the East Persian Tennis Tournament. The runner-up had ridden from Birjand, three hundred miles away, to play him.

MacPherson selected a cheroot, lit it, puffed at it silently for a few moments, and then said :

" Those notes—— "

" Ah," Lee thought, " the notes again. The notes have brought him over. He can think of nothing else."

He said aloud :

" Yes ? "

" It's Rouevsky."

" Rouevsky ? " Lee exclaimed. He sat bolt upright suddenly in his chair, attentive, astonished. " How do you know that ? "

" I suspected it," said MacPherson slowly. " To-night Isaak Khan—— "

" Oh ! " said Lee. " Our spy ? "

MacPherson nodded.

" Rouevsky has collected four hundred thousand in notes. He's going to rush us before the caravan gets in."

" The devil ! " Lee cried.

" It means putting up the shutters," said MacPherson. " Perhaps worse. The bank. . . ."

" Is Finlay short ? " Lee's mind worked quickly. Finlay was manager in Tabriz.

MacPherson nodded.

" Finlay's short, I know. And Trevor's short, probably."

" Trevor's all right," said Lee. " Tehran can

rush krans to Resht in three days along that road. But Finlay! The Tabriz road is worse than ours. They could never reach Finlay in time."

MacPherson drew the crumpled telegram from his pocket and spread it out upon the table.

"The caravan has reached Sebzewar. That's a hundred and forty miles away. The camels can do sixteen miles a day. That's nine days. Rouevsky knows all about the caravan. He's going to present the notes before it can get in. That means putting up the shutters."

Lee jumped to his feet.

"By God, not yet, MacPherson!" he cried.

V

The last of the narrow wooden boxes, strapped with iron and sealed with innumerable red seals, lay in the mud beside the cart, protected somewhat by it from the slanting rain. Lee, overcome with the exertion of loading the wagon, sat down upon the box and wiped the rain and sweat from his face. The wind, chilled by its passage through the snow-blocked passes, was blowing down the wide open spaces of the valley. It was cold—cold as the devil.

He could see, through the immense pointed arch, at once so noble and so simple, which towered before him, the great rectangular courtyard of the caravanserai, which for three centuries had been a refuge for countless caravans and legions of forgotten pilgrims. Saduk, his driver, was leading a pair of horses out of the dark domed stables, whose

arched doorway loomed like the entrance to a black dungeon in the farthest corner of the courtyard.

The two horses were backed in, one on either side of the white shaft, and their traces fastened to the whiffle-trees. Then Saduk, the driver, a stocky, dark-visaged Turk, in a sheep-skin coat, approached the box where Lee was sitting.

"The road is spoiled," he said laconically.

"It is nothing," Lee answered. "With the help of God we shall return as we came."

The Turk waited, making no movement either of dissent or acquiescence. At last he said stolidly, with no effort at persuasion:

"When we came, the wagon was empty. Also it had not rained. Now the wagon is heavy with the boxes and for twelve hours it has rained without ceasing. The road is spoiled. Let the camels continue with the loads to Meshed."

Lee shook his head. "The boxes must be there in three days at the latest. The camels can only travel four farsakhs a day; in the wagon we can travel eight. In three days we shall be there. Bring the horses."

The Turk turned and sauntered off. He had said his say.

He returned leading a second pair of horses. He backed them in, one on each side of the first pair, and fastened their traces to the hanging whiffle-trees. The horses stood four abreast in the stinging rain, with lowered heads.

When the last trace was fastened, Lee rose from his seat and pointed to the last box. Saduk advanced and took hold of one end. Lee's stalwart

body-servant took hold of the other. The two men lifted the box and laid it in the wagon.

The camel-drivers, who had brought the precious boxes from the capital—a twenty-five days' journey—were seated on the ground in the shelter of the great archway of the caravanserai. They had been watching, seemingly without interest, the loading. When the last box was placed inside, they rose slowly from their haunches and advanced towards the wagon. They hesitated, stopped, and regarded impassively the figure of the Englishman. At last one of them said :

" Sah'b, we have a petition—— "

" What is it ? " said Lee shortly.

" Sah'b, the road—— "

" What is the matter with the road ? "

" We make a petition—it is spoiled," answered the camel-driver.

" Spoiled ? How do you know that ? "

The camel-drivers looked at one another and smiled—the smile of those who know exactly where they stand. Then one of them said :

" How do we know ? We know. For twelve months in the year it is our business. The road has been spoiled by the rain. A flood has come and the river is up to here." He placed a hand horizontally at his middle. " Also, the plain is like a sea. Your *garri* cannot pass. Let our camels continue with the boxes to Meshed." He made a count with his fingers. " We will deliver them in Meshed in six days."

Lee shook his head. " That will be too late. The boxes must be in Meshed in three days. In three days at the latest."

The camel-drivers turned away and resumed their seats beneath the arched entrance of the caravanserai. Like the Turk, they had said their say.

Then Lee placed his foot upon the thick hub of the front wheel and swung himself up into the seat beside the driver. The Turk called to his animals and caressed the near horse with his whip. They were off.

The rain beat an incessant tattoo on the canvas above their heads. Yet Lee noted with satisfaction that in spite of the steady downpour the road was hard and not uneven. For two hours the horses toiled up and trotted down the short inclines, which, as they neared the plain, gradually flattened out. At the edge of the foothills they reached a village of half a dozen windowless mud hovels. Before the dark entrance of its one tea-house a closed barouche was standing. A Persian gentleman, wearing over his shoulders a gown shaped like a collegian's, of fine brown woollen cloth, stepped out of the carriage as Saduk the Turk pulled up his horses.

Lee jumped down and approached the entrance of the tea-house. The Persian gentleman regarded with swift interest the foreigner who chose to travel in such an unseemly vehicle. He stopped before a square hole which did service for a door and in courtly fashion bowed to Lee to enter first.

When, over their tiny glasses of sweet, straw-coloured tea, they had exchanged the polite civilities of custom, Lee said :

" Your Honour is arriving from Nishapur ? "

" Alas, no ! " said the Persian. " I am on my way

thither. I started out this morning from this village, but had to return. The road—— "

He raised both hands in the air to denote the indescribable.

" That is bad news for me," said Lee. " I have to reach Nishapur to-morrow."

" In that *garri*? " said the Persian. " Impossible ! The plain is under water. Every ditch is a river. Do you know the road ? "

Lee nodded. " I came over it two days ago."

" The dry river-bed which you crossed half-way between this place and Hassanabad is a torrent. It is quite impassable. You had better order your driver to unharness your horses, as I have done, and wait here until the weather improves. A day's sun will make all the difference."

Lee shook his head.

" What ? " cried the Persian. " You are going on ? With a loaded *garri*, too ? The river—— "

A figure darkened the entrance of the tea-house. It was Saduk the Turk. He said :

" The road is spoiled."

Lee answered : " We shall start in twenty minutes." He turned to the Persian. " I am grieved that it is quite impossible for me to accept Your Excellency's suggestion. But I am bound to reach Meshed in three days. It is an urgent affair."

" Good," said the Persian, smiling grimly. " I shall have the pleasure of pulling you out of the mud when I come along."

The road stretched in a straight line before them, outward and downward, from the village towards the plain of Nishapur. As far as Lee could see, it

was empty: not a carriage, not a horseman, not a villager, not a pilgrim even was daring the adventure of the swollen river and the sodden plain.

When they emerged from the foothills, the road, which had been hard and even, changed to a wide, unmetalled track—scored with cart-ruts and pitted with the myriad footprints of animals. Every hollow was filled with shining water. The horses were walking now, because the surface was sodden and uneven. They splashed at every step. Two deep, parallel ruts, running with water, stretched far behind the wagon. Saduk, the stocky Turk, kept calling to his animals: "On, my children!" Then he would flick a laggard with his whip and cry: "Ai, son of a dog!"

Suddenly, as if it had risen out of the ground, a muffled figure on horseback appeared ahead of them. The rider drew rein as he approached. Saduk's horses, sensing the wish of their driver, stopped. The horseman raised an arm.

"Go back," he shouted through the rain. "The river is in flood."

Saduk the Turk muttered: "What did I say?"

"Drive on," said Lee.

"On, my children!" cried the Turk, and flicked his whip.

The pace was slow, a bare two miles an hour. Lee thought: "On the other side of the plain the road rises into hills again, where the soil is dry and hard. Only twenty-five more miles and our troubles will be over. . . ."

The wagon stopped suddenly. Lee looked anxiously at the horses. The outer off-horse turned

half round, lifted up his head and yawned, showing his pink gums and yellow teeth. Saduk flicked it with his whip and called again: "On, my children!" The four animals strained at their collars. The wagon did not move.

Lee swung himself over the front wheel to the ground. He sank up to his ankles in mud and water. His Persian servant followed. The two men went to the rear of the wagon, one to each side, and placed their shoulders against a muddy spoke of each rear wheel.

"Now!" Lee shouted, and pushed with all his might. Saduk half-rose from his seat. His whip sounded with a menacing crack.

"Ai, sons of dogs!" he shouted.

The wagon creaked and started forward. Lee and the servant clambered in as they could. For half a mile the horses kept up a brisk walk, splashing through the mud.

Then they stopped again. This time Saduk the Turk jumped down. He let the reins hang loose—there was no danger of the horses bolting on that road! He made a wide detour first to the right, stopping every few yards to test the ground; then to the left, testing the ground again. He returned at last and clambered back into his seat. Lee and the Persian were at their stations by the rear wheels. Once more Lee gave the signal and heaved until he thought his back would break. The voice of Saduk, as he called his horses, was fierce, implacable. Each crack of his whip sounded like a pistol-shot. The wagon groaned—and was off! Saduk the Turk swung her away from the cart-tracks, leftwards,

into the plain, where he had found a harder bottom. Lee and the Persian trudged behind. Lee felt the water squelching inside his boots.

It had stopped raining. The going, too, seemed easier. The horses, certainly, were putting forth less effort. The voice of Saduk became less menacing. The plain had begun to slope gently downward. Lee thought: "The river—we are approaching the river."

Then he caught sight of it—a broad, wicked expanse of swirling, yellow water. When he had crossed it two days before, the track had plunged abruptly over the edge of a shallow ravine, then crossed an expanse of dry boulders, stones and sand, in the middle of which had trickled a finger of water. Now the whole ravine had disappeared: the river had risen above its shallow banks and spread over the plain.

Lee thought: "They will never pull her through." Saduk the Turk made no sign. When they reached the edge of the water, he dropped the reins, climbed down from his seat, and began in a leisurely manner to undo the traces. Lee looked on, nonplussed.

With that skill with a rope which every man in Persia who has to do with animals on the road possesses, Saduk the Turk slung a box on either side of each of the four horses. That done, he sat down on the ground and began to divest himself, composedly, of socks and trousers. Lee and the Persian followed suit. Unconsciously, the Turk had taken command of the operation. He seized the bridle of one of the animals and led him to the water's edge. The others did the same. He formed

them into line, bidding each man take hold of the tail of the animal in front of him. The Turk led the way; Lee brought up the rear.

In a moment they were up to their waists in the swirling river. The horses snorted with terror, but the chain of men and animals, guided by the Turk, held firm. The crossing was made without mishap.

Then they unloaded the animals and led them back again. The operation was four times repeated, until all the boxes lay in the mud on the farther side.

When the last box had been lifted from the back of the last animal, Saduk the Turk led his horses back across the river and harnessed them to the empty wagon. Then he climbed into his place again and stood upright, with the reins gathered in his left hand and the whip uplifted in his right. The gallant animals, obeying his voice, rushed down the incline into the water. Lee stood on the farther bank and held his breath. The Turk, erect in his place, hurled at his beasts his bitterest invectives, lashed them with his whip. Whatever there had been of mercy in his being seemed dried up. The animals must do his will or die there in the stream. The muddy water was churned and whitened round their floundering bodies. Amid shouts and curses, the noise of grinding wheels and splashing water, the hiss and crackle of the whip, they scrambled out and stood, spent, panting, on the bank.

Then began the racking task of loading up again. When it was finished, they started off. A few hundred yards beyond, the horses stopped again.

The two men put their aching shoulders to the wheels, knowing full well that it was useless: the wagon had sunk in mud and water half-way to the axles. Saduk the Turk made only one attempt to start. When that failed, he stood up in his place and surveyed the landscape. Then he jumped down and climbed a little hillock nearby which rose a few feet above the level of the plain. He called to Lee:

"Sah'b, the horses are tired." He pointed to the grey west. "Night is coming on. The animals must rest and be fed. It is two farsakhs to Hassanabad, the nearest village." He pointed to the hillock on which he stood. "We will put the boxes here and I will drive the empty *garri* to the village. I will send donkeys to bring the boxes in. By morning the horses will be rested and with the help of God we will go on."

Lee saw that the plan was good. Indeed, there was hardly an alternative. The horses could not drag the wagon any farther, that was clear. Night was at hand. The sack of straw and barley which the Turk carried underneath his seat was not sufficient for a night's feed; and in the midst of that sodden plain the horses could get no rest.

They set to work to unload the wagon again. One by one, the iron-strapped boxes were lifted out and carried to the little hillock. Lee built them up into two parallel walls, and covered the space between with a blanket, to form a shelter against wind and rain. Upon the ground inside, he emptied the sack of straw.

Then Saduk the Turk climbed into his seat again

and seized the reins. He stood like a charioteer, shouting strange curses at his animals, threatening them with his thin whip. The frightened beasts forgot their weariness, gathered their trembling legs together for a last effort, reared and pulled her out once more ! Saduk took his seat on the box, smiling a little grimly. He flicked the animals gently with the lash, spoke reassuring words to them. The lightened wagon rolled off, splashing through the mud.

VI

There was a distant shout. A far-off tinkling of bells. Lee sat up. Every muscle on his body ached. He began to remember slowly where he was. The distant shout was repeated. He crawled painfully to the entrance of the shelter and stumbled over the prostrate body of his servant. He rose to his feet and hallooed a reply.

A dark mass was moving towards him across the plain. There was a confused sound of shouting men and jangling bells. Soon a drove of donkeys, each with its pack-saddle on its back, appeared out of the gloom.

He let the villagers do the loading. Indeed, in a matter so technical his help would have been of little value. One by one, the boxes were laid across the donkeys' packs and bound with black goat-hair thongs. The caravan started for the village.

Dawn was breaking when they came suddenly upon a group of dark mud hovels, huddled together behind a little hill. As the caravan approached, a

man came forward to meet them. It was Saduk the Turk. He saluted, and said, simply, as if the whole future of the bank did not depend upon his words :

" One of the horses has gone lame."

Lee thought : " The game is up." He was glad, almost.

Then Saduk said : " A petition is made. There is still a way : we can hire donkeys to carry the loads from village to village. By marching day and night——"

Lee said : " We will start in half an hour."

VII

He could hardly see the dial of his watch, his eyes were swimming so. The bank had been open since nine. That made him five hours late. But Mac would not be in a hurry to begin paying out. He would pay slowly, to gain time. There was still a chance. . . .

He stumbled along the stony road behind the animals. When at last they entered the gloom of the covered bazaar, the shop-keepers and the passers-by stared at the drove of donkeys with their unfamiliar loads, at the bedraggled Sah'b marching behind them, beside a stocky person in a sheepskin cap, who certainly did not belong to those parts either.

They turned a corner. Lee's eye sought the familiar arch which led into the bank compound.

The huge door which daily, from nine to five, stood open to the world was closed.

He felt dizzy and leaned against a wall. . . .

There was a buzz of voices in his ears. Then someone said in Persian, " His Honour the Manager." An arm was placed under his head, and a familiar voice said :

" Here, old chap ; drink this."

He opened his eyes.

His desk. Asker. Mirza Bartek. Mac, old Mac, of course. The office. He was in the office ! Ah, it was closed—too late ! He mumbled :

" Sorry. Couldn't manage it. Too—much—mud."

" Don't worry, old chap. It's all right. Here, take another sip of this."

It was all right. Mac said it was all right. He closed his eyes.

When he was almost himself again, warming his hands before the fire, Mac said : " Last night Rouevsky came to see me."

Lee looked up, astonished.

" He came in late, after dinner. What do you think he said ? "

Lee shook his head.

" He said that he would let me off on two conditions."

" Conditions ? " cried Lee suspiciously.

" Yes. First, he said, I must promise never again to let you sing ' The Holy City ' at any of my Thursday dinner-parties ! Second, I must invite the missionaries next Thursday evening because he was going to dance the Karadagh national dance ! He had been taught it, he said, by a

Khan of Shousha, and it was, on the whole, quite respectable."

"Whatever did you say to that?"

"I said that all this had nothing to do with banking and that I would see him damned first. He agreed with me as to the banking. He added, however, sorrowfully, that his only inheritance from a profligate parent was an inveterate bias for the extravagant and the picturesque. This, he said, had impelled him to put forward conditions which to a Scotsman might appear wild or inconclusive. The Scotch, he said, were a great race and always got what they wanted because they were singularly free from those distressing humours which beset the unfortunate Russians. We parted good friends; but he swore that he would have to close us up to-day, because then I could never invite him to dinner any more; and he would thus be spared the torture of hearing you sing 'The Holy City.' Come to think of it, Reggie, that song. . . . But I got even with him."

"You did?"

"You bet. You see, Reggie, I had already made up my mind what I was going to do if you didn't turn up by nine o'clock this morning; so I closed the bank, hoisted the flag——"

"What! You closed the bank?"

"Yes, and told 'em it was the King's birthday."

"The King's birthday!" Lee cried in astonishment. "But, my dear fellow, the King's birthday isn't till June——"

"Aye," said MacPherson, "and why shouldn't the King, God bless him, have an extra birthday—

just to help out a couple of his loyal subjects who are trying to keep their end up in a forgotten corner of the airth? By the Lord, Reggie, if you hadn't turned up to-day, I'd have given 'em the Prince of Wales's birthday to-morrow!"

Made and Printed in Great Britain
by Hazell, Watson & Viney Ld.
London and Aylesbury

An Englishm

unteers. Jack

N. Y. Times, Ju

Pyle From "Howard Pyle's Book of th

A PERSIAN CARAVAN. By A Cecil Edwards. Illustrated. 1 pp. New York: Harper & Bro $2.50.

624 pp. Harrison

THESE curious tales by A. Cec Edwards are not the impre sions of an Englishman wh went east of Suez; they are th tales of one more thoroughly home in the Orient. For Mr. E wards was born of English paren in Constantinople and was grad ated from Robert College ther Since the beginning of the centu he has been in the Oriental r business, first in Constantinople a later as Persian manager for t same concern. Naturally, duri the thirteen years of his experien in Persia he covered all parts the country. And out of the ri sources of material he gathered writes with first-hand intimac telling his tales with the simpl sure effectiveness of a good sto teller.

He does not bring us the Pers of romances, but a more bizar country, if anything. Mr. Edwar is concerned with realistic concept for many of his tales turn on trad and trading in Persia has not be conducive of dreamy reverie. these fourteen stories he frequent concerns himself with presentin the abruptness with which Persia scenes can change from the pictu esque to the picaresque. He d velops along broad lines the trad tional mannerisms and habits the Persians—the ceremonial ma ners, the perpetual intrigue, t irony of their minds, their brut decisiveness and their high rega for elegant and tasty cuisine at times. Occasionally a tale turns a grotesque bit of humor.

Mr. Edwards offers a very ni

s of the om the others e South. thing in the his- bly been certain gonist a re than be some- he word mething Evelyn beled a the his- is pro- ernecine nd, and ginning ges the onal in- ok. And ar itself pon the throng is word ng this is in a cept in pe with is nar- on in an hods of thod he Scott's feels a nd sub- or long. called a Wave" loys the

word. Indeed, it is a qu the author does not expec supply a greater knowled than one should be called and whether, for the reade sion of so much knowled fact that the novel so blu to be interesting. That in novel blurs cannot be de only saved by the immense of its individual parts. There are other parts not so powerful. The reader with the history of the conflict in mind can carry himself past these portions of minor intensity. Other readers may not so readily find themselves moved to continue. Yet those who do not continue will miss the one striking feature of the book—the author's astonishing ability to project herself into widely different phases of that gigantic battle of multifarious forces bearing the collective name of the Civil War.

One moment Miss Scott is behind the lines in the South, the scene a church sewing circle, the